Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/stanleybrereton00ains_0

3 vols

STANLEY BRERETON

BY

WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH,

AUTHOR OF

"THE TOWER OF LONDON."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS,

BROADWAY, LUDGATE HILL.

NEW YORK: 9, LAFAYETTE PLACE.

[*Right of Translation reserved by the Author.*]

TO

THOMAS BAKER, Esq.,

Mayor of Manchester.

My Dear Mr. Mayor,

As I deem the Banquet given by you in my honour, in my native City of Manchester, one of the most important events in my Life, I shall endeavour to evince my sense of it by inscribing this Tale to you.

To you, moreover, and to the friends assembled on the occasion, I owe the gratifying title conferred upon me of the "Lancashire Novelist," and I assure you I feel extremely proud of the distinction.

And never surely was there a happier idea, or one more tastefully carried out, than the presentation to each guest at your Banquet of an artistic little brochure containing a Portrait and Memoir of the Author you had so greatly honoured, with specimens of the illustrations of his works.

As an Introduction to this Tale I have given a revised report of the Banquet, that my readers may judge of it.

Yours deeply obliged,

W. HARRISON AINSWORTH.

September, 1881.

BANQUET

TO

WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH, Esq.,

At the Manchester Town Hall, 15th September, 1881.

On the evening of September 15th, 1881, the Mayor of Manchester (Mr. Alderman Baker), to whom the city is so much indebted for his long services as Chairman of the Free Libraries Committee and for other public labours, entertained Mr. William Harrison Ainsworth, the well-known novelist, to a banquet at the Town Hall, Albert-square, and invited to meet him about one hundred of the leading literary men of his native city, together with a few ladies identified with the literature of the county. Since the days of the old Athenæum soirées, when Charles Dickens, the late Lord Beaconsfield, and other distinguished men were in the habit of visiting Manchester, no such gathering has been held in that city, nor can we call to mind a single case where its chief magistrate has given such a marked and public recognition to men eminent in literature. The proceedings took place in the Mayor's banqueting-room, which presented a very charming and striking appearance. The Mayor received his guests—the bells of the Town Hall merrily ringing the while—in the reception-room, and such had been the happy selection made in issuing the invitations that everybody seemed to know everybody else, and there was, therefore, no stiffness and no need of formal introductions. A happy idea of the Mayor's, in the form of an

eight-paged book, relating to Mr. Harrison Ainsworth and his works, was placed in the hands of each guest. It will form a valuable memento of the interesting occasion. The title-page contains a photograph of Mr. Ainsworth, his coat-of-arms, date and place of birth, &c. Inside is a biography, and then follow, in chronological order, extracts from the novels themselves, or comments upon them, accompanied by *fac-simile* etchings of the original illustrations from George Cruikshank, Sir John Gilbert, John Franklin, "Phiz," and W. Alfred Delamotte. The following works are thus treated: "Rookwood," "Crichton," "Jack Sheppard," "The Tower of London," "Guy Fawkes," "Old Saint Paul's," "The Miser's Daughter," "Windsor Castle," "The Lancashire Witches," and "Mervyn Clitheroe." An interesting extract from the latter work, relating to the Manchester Grammar School in Mr. Ainsworth's school days, is added. On the back page is a chronological list of the whole of his works from 1834 to the present year, the first being "Rookwood," the last "Stanley Brereton." This *brochure* is a marvel of artistic reproduction, and has been designed and executed under the superintendence of Mr. Thomas N. Storer, of Messrs. Henry Blacklock and Co., of Manchester, and is probably the best of its kind ever produced.

The following is a list of the guests:—James Crossley, F.S.A.; Edmund Yates (editor of the *World*), Ralph F. Ainsworth, M.D.; W. E. A. Axon; H. M. Acton, B.A.; William Angus, W. T. Arnold, B.A.; Councillor Ben Brierley, John E. Bailey, F.S.A.; E. J. Broadfield, B.A.; Alderman W. H. Bailey, Councillor W. Scott Brown, Samuel Crompton, M.D.; R. C. Christie, M.A., Chancellor of the Diocese; H. T. Crofton, Councillor James Croston, F.S.A.; William Dawes, J. P. Earwaker, M.A., F.S.A.; John Evans, George Evans, George Falkner, Colonel Henry Fishwick, F.S.A.; Leo Grindon, Rev. Silas K. Hocking, H. H. Howorth, F.S.A.; Charles Hardwick, James Bower Harrison, M.D.; Howard James Harrison, Abel Heywood, Jun., Francis Hitchman, William Hind-

shaw, Charles Hadfield, Alderman Abel Heywood, William Hughes, Thomas Helsby, Alexander Ireland, John Leigh, Joseph C. Lockhart, Thomas Letherbrow, Alfred Owen Legge, Robert Langton, George Milner, President of the Manchester Literary Club; John Mortimer, Councillor J. G. Mandley, J. H. Nodal, Thomas Newbigging, Arthur O'Neill, Rev. W. A. O'Conor, B.A.; John Page, John Plant, F.G.S.; Councillor C. Rowley, B. A. Redfern, Frank Renaud, M.D.; George Richardson, J. Paul Rylands, F.S.A.; Councillor Thomas Schofield, Councillor J. W. Southern, Colonel Thomas Sowler, Thomas Nathan Storer, Thomas Smelt, Richard Smith, B.A.; Charles W. Sutton, chief librarian of the Manchester Free Library; John Fox Turner, Alderman Joseph Thompson, Edwin Waugh, T. R. Wilkinson, Professor A. S. Wilkins, M.A.; William Wilkinson Whitaker. The following ladies also received invitations: Mrs. G. Linnæus Banks, Mrs. Stanford Harris, and Miss Jessie Fothergill.

The MAYOR, who was very warmly received, proposed the toast of "The Queen."

He said: The reign of Her Majesty has been one of the longest in English history, and it has been one of the most distinguished in literary efforts. The Queen has not hesitated to enrol herself amongst the brotherhood, she having distinguished herself as an author, and a publisher. Therefore, independently of her own personal excellent qualities, we may look upon her as one who has promoted literature in every way that is consistent with her high station. I have very great pleasure in proposing to you the health of her most gracious Majesty Queen Victoria.

The toast was cordially honoured.

The MAYOR next gave "The Prince and Princess of Wales and all the Royal family." He said: I have recently had the opportunity of seeing the Prince and the Princess of Wales. I was very much struck with the dignity and the urbanity of manner of His Royal Highness; and as regards the Princess of Wales, her demeanour and, I may

be permitted to say, her beauty are beyond all praise. (Hear, hear.) There is every prospect that when the time shall come for his Royal Highness to ascend the throne of this kingdom we shall find him a man so thoroughly educated as to be an honour to the realm and to the people over whom he will reign. (Applause.)

The toast having been drunk,

The MAYOR said: I have now to ask your attention while I propose the health of the gentleman in whose honour we are met—(applause)—distinguished as being a fellow-citizen with us, his immediate ancestors having for several generations resided within a very short distance of the spot whereon we are now assembled, and distinguished also for the possession of the highest literary ability of any living native of Manchester. (Applause.) My personal acquaintance with Mr. Ainsworth, though it dates back some forty years, has, unfortunately for myself, not been of an intimate character. But the mental intimacy which I have with Scott, and Bulwer, and Southey, and Thackeray, all men of my day whom I did not know, has in his case the vitality of just so much personal knowledge as has enabled me, while I was reading his books, to picture to myself the personal appearance of the author of them. (Hear, hear.) I may, perhaps, refer to other circumstances which bring Mr. Ainsworth in closer relation to me. He was brought up to the same profession as myself, and the gentleman with whom he served his articles closed the active duties of his life in Manchester by occupying for two years the exalted position which the kindness of my fellow-citizens has called me to occupy at the present time. (Applause.) I was intimately acquainted with Mr. Alexander Kay, and was on visiting terms with him, and though I was not at the time a member of the Corporation of Manchester, I have been informed on most unquestionable authority that Mr. Alexander Kay was the best Mayor that Manchester ever possessed. (Hear, hear.) The thought, gentlemen, that we should pay some mark of respect to Mr. Ainsworth

has passed through the minds of several gentlemen who are now present. (Hear.) My position enables me to-night to give that thought a local habitation and a name. We all knew that our fellow-citizen had through a long life contributed very greatly to the intellectual pleasure of his countrymen, that he had made many a heart glad, and that many a reader of his works had risen from the perusal of them refreshed, invigorated, amused, and instructed. (Hear, hear.) It would have been a very easy thing to fill the great hall of this building with admirers of his genius. (Hear, hear.) It would have been very easy to bring here to-night all the eloquence which this city possesses; but this was not my object. It was rather to make this a gathering of local literary men, who had a kindred spirit with our fellow-townsman and the power of appreciating fully his great ability and genius. And while I wished through them to pay a compliment to him, I wished also through him to pay a compliment to them, and to show my sense of literary merit, though it does not attain the popularity of "Guy Fawkes" or "Windsor Castle." (Applause.) And now, gentlemen, in reference to something else. Manchester does not possess many living lady authors. But all that I know I have invited, and they are now present. (Applause.) I should have rejoiced if I could have brought into this room with Mr. Ainsworth the survivors of his days at the Manchester Grammar School. The Rev. George Heron, who was on the same form with him at the Grammar School, would have been with us to-night but for an important engagement at a distance which he could not possibly put off; and the Rev. John Howard Marsden wrote to me to say that it would have given him the very greatest pleasure to have been present this evening if he had been twenty years younger, so that he could have hazarded a journey so far north from the place of his residence in Essex. (Hear, hear.) And with regard to Sir Humphrey de Trafford, who is the only other person that I could ascertain as having been at the Grammar School with Mr. Ainsworth, the

answer I have received from him is that he is too great an invalid to attend. We may congratulate ourselves that Mr. Ainsworth is in a sufficiently hale state of body and mind to be with us to-night to receive our recognition of his great literary abilities. (Applause.) It forms no part, gentlemen, of my duty to-night to offer any criticisms upon Mr. Ainsworth's voluminous works. I may, however, remark that he has embodied in them just so much of historical matter to give great interest to his stories ; in point of fact to make them most delightful reading. (Hear, hear, and applause.) He has also done another thing which gives him a claim to the gratitude of every native of this county, by introducing into his works the legends and the characters of past times in this county—(hear, hear)—and by making the folk-lore and speech of Lancashire a distinctive literature. (Applause.) And, now, just one other subject. It is fitting that I should say something about the amount of popularity which Mr. Ainsworth's works enjoy in this his native city. (Hear, hear, and cheers.) And on this point I am enabled to speak with some authority. In our Manchester public free libraries there are 250 volumes of Mr. Ainsworth's different works. (Applause.) During the last twelve months those volumes have been read 7660 times—(applause)—mostly by the artisan class of readers. (Hear, hear.) And this means that twenty volumes of his works are being perused in Manchester by readers of the free libraries every day all the year through. (Applause.) My statistics would be incomplete if I did not tell you which of his books are most read. It would be a pleasure to me if I could only read Mr. Ainsworth's mind and know what the conviction is on this point which he entertains. (Hear, hear.) Whether I shall astonish him, or whether the result of my inquiry agrees with the result which prevails in his own mind, I really cannot tell. But I will give you six of his most popular works, and in the order in which they are most read. The first is—what ? (Laughter.) "The Tower of London." (Loud applause.)

The next is—what ? The ladies can tell me. (Laughter.) It is "The Lancashire Witches." The third is "Old St. Paul's." Then comes "Windsor Castle," "The Miser's Daughter," and "The Manchester Rebels." (Applause.) I think now, gentlemen, I have said enough to make you agree with me in saying that we may consider ourselves very proud in having such a man as Mr. Harrison Ainsworth among us. (Applause.) We may consider ourselves very proud in having him here to-night to tell him how much we appreciate his genius and his industry. (Applause.) And he, too, will, I think, be gratified to hear that he has given and is giving so much pleasure and instruction to the reading part of the community of England. (Applause.) I have only one more remark to make and then I conclude. A work of fiction which may have been produced in solitude and silence is sent into the world and becomes the means of interesting and enlightening millions. I ask you to drink the health of Mr. William Harrison Ainsworth. (Loud applause.)

The toast was enthusiastically honoured.

Mr. Ainsworth, who was received with cheers on rising to respond, said : With those ringing cheers in my ear, I scarcely know how to thank you ; but I can assure you that I really think this is the most gratifying moment of my life. I feel proud, and beyond measure indebted to my excellent friend the Mayor, for the kindly welcome he has given me. Nothing has delighted me more than to be styled, as I have been, the "Lancashire novelist." (Hear hear.) You have heard it said to-night that the most popular of my works is "The Tower of London." It may be so, but I can assure you that my desire has really been to write a Lancashire novel, a novel that should please the whole county, and I don't care whether it pleased anybody else. (Applause.) If I really thought that the designation which I have latterly received of the "Lancashire novelist" were justified, I should indeed feel proud. I hope I may deserve it ; I hope it may attach to my name. My great ambition has been to connect my

name as an author with the city of my birth, and with this aim I have chosen certain subjects that would give me a chance of doing so. I sought to describe the Rebellion of '45 and the visit to Manchester of the unfortunate Prince Charles. With the old city as it existed at the period I was tolerably familiar, from the views I had seen of it, and could conjure up its picturesque black and white houses and other ancient structures, most of which, I grieve to say, have now entirely disappeared. In the days I refer to there was a very strong Jacobite feeling in Lancashire, and especially amongst the oldest families in Manchester—(hear, hear)—many of whom were devoted to what they deemed the "good cause." Prominent amongst these were Dr. Byrom and his charming daughter Beppy, both of whom had always the strongest attraction for me. Tom Syddall, the Jacobite barber of Manchester —(applause)—was likewise a favourite, as were Dr. Deacon and his sons and Jemmy Dawson. In "Beatrice Tyldesley" I have described the Jacobite trials in Manchester in 1694. In "The Leaguer of Lathom, a Tale of the Civil War in Lancashire," and in "Preston Fight; or, the Insurrection of 1715," I had other periods to deal with and other parts of the county to depict; and in the locality of "The Lancashire Witches" I had very picturesque and curious scenery to describe, and I strove to do justice to it. (Hear, hear.) But it is in a modern story, portions of which may almost be termed autobiographical, that I have described my early days in Manchester and neighbourhood—my old schoolfellows and schoolmasters, Dr. Smith and Dr. Elsdale, and I have now had my reward. (Applause). I have been honoured by the Chief Magistrate of my native city, who has bidden me to a Banquet at which I have been received with a warmth I shall never forget. (Applause.) I thank you again most heartily for the reception you have accorded me. I shall ever look back with pride and pleasure to this day. (Applause.) And now, before sitting down, I would fain say a word respecting a much valued and excellent friend;

I allude to Mr. Gilbert Winter, whom I regard as one of the best specimens of the Manchester men of the last generation—(applause)—a model of kindly hospitality, a man of business, a man of the strictest honour, and untiring in his zeal to serve a friend. (Applause.) Mr. Gilbert Winter must have been known to many gentlemen now present; and I am sure they will concur in the opinion I have expressed of him. (Hear, hear.) He resided in the house on the Cheetham-road now occupied by another old friend of mine—(applause)—for whom I have an equally strong regard, and whom I am happy to see beside me to-night—I allude to Mr. James Crossley. (Applause.) I need not expatiate on Mr. Crossley's social qualities, on his learning and scholarship, on his varied and extensive reading. It is not an extravagant compliment to say that he may be compared to the great Dr. Johnson himself. (Hear, hear.) As I cannot doubt that the honour paid me by the Mayor is due to my having gained some distinction as a chronicler of Lancashire, I may congratulate myself on obeying the impulse that prompted me to select that particular walk. (Hear, hear.) I believe my task to be well-nigh accomplished, and can scarcely hope to write another tale, but should I do so I shall return to the old ground, and strive to maintain the honourable distinction I have acquired as the "Lancashire novelist." (Applause.) Mr. Mayor and gentlemen, I am thankful to have lived to see this day. (Applause.)

Mr. James Crossley, F.S.A., proposed the next toast, "The Archæological and Historical Societies of the County Palatine of Lancaster." He said: I might say a great deal of these societies with which I have the honour to be connected. I might report to you what they have done, and I could likewise tell you a great deal of what they intend to do. Further, gentlemen, I might say much in regard to those indefatigable labourers who have collected together a vast quantity of materials which will enable us ultimately, I hope, to have the best county his-

tory of any county in the kingdom. But, gentlemen, that is a large subject, and I think the aspect of the toast that I am most called to direct myself to is that which concerns especially my excellent friend, Mr. Harrison Ainsworth. (Hear, hear.) When, gentlemen, I look upon that long series of novels which he has published, extending in the good orthodox three-volume form, to somewhere about one hundred volumes, I cannot but consider that there is a possibility of the time arriving when his ample resources may come to an end, for, as the fertility of the most fertile must have its limit, it may be impossible to have always at hand plots and subjects and characters. (Laughter.) When that time does come—when, like the Governors of the Bank of England, who, seeing bullion going out more rapidly than is consistent with financial policy and, perhaps, with financial security, think it necessary to call in some agency which will rectify and readjust the balance—if ever that does happen to Mr. Ainsworth, I may say he cannot do better than direct himself to the societies which are embodied in the toast. (Laughter.) Old Mr. Simeon, of Cambridge, used to encourage his clerical friends by saying, "My dear sir, whenever your theological cistern is drawn dry come to me ; I have one hundred skeletons of sermons which are ready at your service, and which will keep you on your legs for a considerable time to come." (Laughter.) The reverend gentleman's metaphors were rather confused, but still the offer, I have no doubt, gave great satisfaction —(laughter)—and must have been a comfort and consolation to his clerical friends. (Laughter.) Should it be necessary for our excellent friend, Mr. Ainsworth, to direct himself to some assistance of that kind, I can, I think, on behalf of these societies say that we will find him the skeletons of one hundred historical novels—(laughter)—which with his master hand and his creative power can be made instinct with life, and form a very considerable addition to that long procession of heroes and heroines with which he has made us familiar, and which

are extensive enough almost to form a literature of themselves, and which certainly will require and undoubtedly deserve—and I recommend it to the attention of Mr. Charles Sutton if he happens to be here—an Ainsworth Bibliography. (Applause.) I now will direct myself to another subject which I think, perhaps, considering the object of our present meeting, will be rather interesting. I was very forcibly struck on coming into this room with the recollection of another dinner in honour of Mr. Ainsworth which took place just forty years ago in London, and at which I had the good fortune to be present. It was given in celebration of his popular, and deservedly popular, "Tower of London;" and if any one wishes to know how Mr. Ainsworth looked at that time—for forty years make rather a difference in a man's personal appearance—(laughter)—I cannot do better than recommend him to look at the fine contemporary portrait painted by Pickersgill, Sen., which, through the kindness of Mr. Ainsworth, now adorns the librarian's room in the Chetham Hospital. (Hear, hear.) Generally when I go into that room I look up at that portrait, and it puts me in good humour for the day. (Laughter.) The place where this London dinner was given was one of those old hotels, spacious and commodious, which had the reputation of many good dinners. It was in the neighbourhood of Fleet-street, and I have no doubt that at the present time, in the progress of improvements which are going on, it is entirely swept away along with Temple Bar and Isaac Walton's habitation. The inn was a comfortable one, and excellently adapted for the party, which in number was about the same that I now see around me. The chairman on that occasion was Mr. Serjeant (afterwards Mr. Justice) Talfourd, a man who had no superior that I ever met with, when he had a fine subject before him, in giving it all the ornament that could be given to it by beautiful and appropriate language. (Hear, hear.) He likewise had that gift which is so admirable in a chairman of infusing into his audience a certain portion

of the exuberant kindliness which formed part of his nature. The party that was congregated on that occasion was a fair and full representation of those who as authors, as critics, as artists, as publishers, were in the first rank in the metropolis at that time. Amongst them was, then in the full bloom of authorship, delighted and delighting, Charles Dickens—(hear, hear)—and with him his friend and subsequent biographer—I cannot say successful biographer—John Forster; and a host of others whom I could particularise, but there is not time on this occasion to do so. Amongst the party were several of that group of Fraserians of whom I believe Mr. Ainsworth is now the sole survivor, but who still sit around their table perpetuated and pictured by the admirable sketches of Maclise. (Hear, hear.) Nor was there wanting on that occasion that capital artist, whose bark will ever

> Attendant sail,
> Pursue the triumph and partake the gale.

with the works of the distinguished authors whom he so admirably illustrated. Need I say I refer to George Cruikshank? (Applause.) The Chairman, in proposing the toast of the evening, did every justice to the work which had been the means of calling that party together; and in his happiest terms gave his estimate of the literary merits of Mr. Ainsworth. That estimate was a very high one, and it was enthusiastically seconded and adopted by the party present. My only regret is that of that speech and of Mr. Ainsworth's grateful response there is at present no report. Horace deplores the want of the *vates sacer*, but what is the *vates sacer* to the reporter, without whom wit, wisdom, and eloquence are only born and spoken to perish. (Laughter and applause.) The characteristic of the remaining part of the evening was the grand geniality and the utter impossibility of anything like a jar. There were rival authors present, but they did not quarrel; there were hostile critics, but their challenges were limited to champagne; there were men

of different schools, but they broke down the partition in order to make the harmony perfect. There was a case of mortal feud, but it was arranged by an armistice which lasted at all events that evening. I believe everybody spoke—(laughter)—whether accustomed or unaccustomed to public speaking, who was able and capable in his turn of assisting that grand social exhibition. Amongst the gentlemen who were present was one of the name of Swift, who lived to a very advanced age. He was the keeper of the regalia of the Tower, and a collateral relative of the great Dean of St. Patrick's. All that could be expected of him was the usual stereotyped speech of an official, but had the Dean of St. Patrick's himself been resuscitated from the dead he could not have given utterance to a speech more admirably appropriate than that which was spoken by Mr. Swift. (Laughter.) You said at once, "The man who could make such a speech as this deserves to keep the regalia of England." (Laughter.) The good fortune of the speakers extended even to the humble individual who now addresses you. (Hear, hear.) I happened, when called upon, to mention that twenty years before I had the pleasure of co-operating with the Chairman in contributing to a publication which is now, I believe, not forgotten, and that was the *Retrospective Review*. That seemed to touch some pleasant chord in the Serjeant's mind, and he, in his usual impulsive manner, left the chair and gave me a most cordial greeting. (Laughter.) More than that, he invited me, not to see his library—(laughter)—for he thought, possibly, I had seen libraries enough—(renewed laughter)—but invited me to examine and to taste that unique collection of specimens of the fine historical vintages of Oporto—(laughter)—extending in chronological series from 1790 to 1830—which at great trouble and great expense he had collected for himself and well affected friends—(laughter)—and which ultimately—I say nothing about "Ion," or his Parliamentary and forensic eloquence—most deservedly placed him upon

the judicial bench. (Loud laughter.) I accepted the learned Serjeant's invitation, and I made it my business, as far as I could, to assist him in those historical investigations — (laughter) — of which he had supplied the material at his hospitable table. (Laughter.) Gentlemen, I may say further, and I must really conclude the matter by the observation, that the proceedings were carried out with admirable spirit and success to the end. (Laughter.) I cannot tell you—I have referred to my diary, but it does not assist me—at what time we broke up ; but from inquiries I made I ascertained that every guest present awoke a wiser and a better man in the morning, but without the disagreeable headache which generally accompanies that discovery. (Laughter.) Gentlemen, I have always considered that that meeting settled, by a decisive and conclusive verdict, the position of Mr. Ainsworth amongst the novelists of his time. (Hear, hear.) I believe that was not only my feeling, but that of every one present on that occasion. Since that time—it is now a long time ago—Mr. Ainsworth has done much excellent work. He has had, and it must have been a great satisfaction to him, the pleasure of seeing the avidity with which his works are read by the sons and grandsons of those by whom they were read when they first appeared. He has also the satisfaction of knowing that he is popular wherever the English language prevails. (Hear.) His works have been translated into at least five of the great European languages. He has received from all sides kindly tributes, many of which he will, no doubt, consider as amongst his best possessions. But it has also happened, by one of those extraordinary chances, I may say, that do occur, that no voice of a collective or public kind, no general voice of tribute has ever reached him from his native town which has now become one of the great cities of the world. It has been reserved for our excellent Mayor, with that instinctive sense of what is just and right and fitting, and with that prompt liberality which have haracterised his career as Mayor, to remedy this defi-

ciency. He has afforded Manchester, through this dinner, the opportunity of recognising the claims and merits of one of the worthiest of its sons. (Applause.) I am sure the Mayor must be gratified in looking round to-night and seeing what an array of genius, of various talent, extensive knowledge, and of literary power he has been able to call to meet Mr. Ainsworth on this occasion. Though I am no prophet, I will venture to predict that, when the occurrences of his mayoralty pass hereafter under review, the Ainsworth dinner will not be considered the least interesting, the least honourable, or the least memorable, whether as respects himself or Manchester. ("Hear, hear," and applause.) I have to propose to you the toast committed to me. (Applause.)

Mr. H. H. HOWORTH, in responding, said: My venerable friend Mr. Crossley has been connected for such a long time with our local literature that he may well claim to be addressed by every one of us as our father Parmenides. (Hear, hear.) In this character it is not strange that he should speak in terms of affectionate indulgence of the archæological societies of Lancashire. Of the oldest and most renowned of these he has ever been the fostering parent, while he has latterly helped a vigorous offshoot to come into existence which promises to be as long-lived and as widely renowned as its parent. (Hear, hear.) I feel some diffidence in representing these societies this evening, because a person who responds on such occasions should adopt an apologetic key, and it is difficult to apologise for what has been so successful. There is no doubt, however, that in these latitudes the study of archæology needs to justify itself. Our smoking climate and our whirling machinery are poor accompaniments to the voices of the Muses; and we are constantly told that here men are too overwhelmed with the ever-pressing present to have much time to look backwards or to look onwards. On every side the literary man has to meet the questions of a successful Philistinism—Does this pay? Are you making a fortune by it? Mr.

Mayor, is not this very fact a sufficient justification? Do not we all long beyond measure to escape as much as we can from the pressure and the common-place of this everyday life of ours to where more poetry and more romance may be found? (Hear, hear.) But if this be granted, we shall still be told that Lancashire does not afford materials for literature—our rough moorlands and their rough inhabitants were not given to romantic ways. Is this so? May we not claim that the most limpid streams and the most sparkling water come out of the most rugged rocks?—(applause)—while if we object to metaphor, and want to see the kind of poetry that was distilled in these once secluded lands of ours, have I not at my elbow one who has enshrined for ever the humour, the proverbial wisdom, the pathos and poetry which is native here? I mean my good friend Edwin Waugh, whose natural, simple, graceful English is not less admirable than his rich Doric. (Applause.) But this is not all. The societies whom I have the honour to represent, have they not unburied a mass of material full of romance and poetry? (Hear, hear.) Our chief guest to-night is our best witness. (Hear, hear.) How would the "Lancashire Witches" have been written but for the Chetham Society's volumes? (Applause.) Assuredly, if he can claim to have discovered Lancashire as a mine of romance in the sense in which Scott discovered Scotland, these societies may claim to share in the glory. Gentlemen, whatever walk in literature we adopt save one, we shall inevitably have one fate. We shall all be found out presently, and superseded; all, I mean, save the poet and the writer of romances, who deal with the evergreen and changeless passions of men and women. It is their good fortune to paint the past and the future in colours that the eye never wearies of looking at—colours mixed with the glamour of old Time. (Applause.) Emerson once thanked heaven at an American banquet that he had had such glorious ancestors, and then thanked heaven again because he was removed one generation further away from them; but that was grim

matter of fact. There is another side to the shield. You may sometimes have entered an old Gothic pile, and wondered that men should have had the ill taste to fill its windows with so crude a thing as much modern glass; but if you step backward through the aisles, you will see these crudities melt away into a warmer tone and more sober lines; and if you go far enough, you will find that even a window made in the worst period of flaunting, vulgar colours is sobered down into genuine harmony. (Applause.) Time does the same for the rude men and manners of another age that distance does for the worst artistic products of this. (Hear, hear.) May we hope that when we have been thus focussed in the long gallery of the future, our successors and our critics will find us as natural, as true to the soil, and as little given to foreign eccentricity and literary trickery as these brave old men and women of Lancashire were. (Applause.)

Mr. Chancellor CHRISTIE proposed "The literature of the county palatine of Lancaster." He said that when he looked around at the gentlemen assembled, some of them very highly distinguished in literature, he felt how much more justice many of them would have done to the toast which he had the honour to propose. Living, as he did, entirely out of the world, and knowing little of the world except what he derived from the *World*—(laughter)—which he was happy to see so ably represented that evening, he felt a good deal of difficulty in addressing them on so extensive a subject as that of the literature of the county palatine, and he felt the difficulty all the more after the admirable example set by their most distinguished literary resident, Mr. James Crossley—(applause)—who in proposing the toast of "The archæological and historical societies of the county palatine of Lancaster," did not say a word about them—(laughter)—but gave a most interesting and charming account of a dinner in 1840 to their respected guest. (Hear, hear.) He thought that the literature of Lancashire would compare most favourably with the literature of any other county in England. (Hear, hear.)

We had had in Lancashire persons of the greatest literary eminence and distinction, who had produced works which had had a most important effect on the literary history and thought of the country. He need hardly remind them of Mr. Roscoe—(applause)—whose works certainly opened out a new field for historical investigation,—that of the Italian Renaissance. (Hear, hear.) In historical literature, after Roscoe he knew of no writer who had written so great a work as his friend Mr. Howorth on the history of the Mongols. (Applause.) In the department of literary biography, in which Roscoe was so distinguished, we had in Mr. Bailey's "Life of Fuller" another work which certainly entitled its author to take a high rank among literary historians and biographers. But it was certainly in prose fiction that Lancashire was specially distinguished. (Hear, hear.) He had no literary recollections more pleasant, and which went back to an earlier period, than his reading of the novels of "Rookwood" and "Jack Sheppard." (Applause.) He was disappointed that his Worship did not refer to those two books of Mr. Ainsworth as among the most popular and interesting of his writings. He thought he might say of Mr. Ainsworth that there was probably no living man who had given a greater amount of pleasure to a greater number of persons than he had done. (Hear.) Lancashire had produced a very large number of novelists, good, bad, and indifferent. (Laughter.) The bad and indifferent he would pass on one side. (Laughter.) But there was one branch of prose fiction which they ought to remember on that occasion, when they had met to do honour to the most celebrated Lancashire novelist, and that was the branch which had been created by a number of very distinguished female authors. He need hardly say that the foundress of that great school was Mrs. Gaskell. She was the first to reveal to the world outside this county what the working men and women of Lancashire were. (Hear, hear.) Previous to the appearance of "Mary Barton," they had been described only by carica-

turists who were entirely ignorant of the truth, or by persons who were deficient in literary gifts and humour. Mrs. Gaskell had been most worthily followed by a series of lady authors, some of whom were present on that occasion. Among these were Mrs. Linnæus Banks, Miss Jessie Fothergill, Mrs. F. H. Burnett, and Mrs. Sidney Potter, whose works gave evidence of an intimate knowledge of Lancashire life, combined with much literary power. In conclusion, he expressed the hope that in Manchester literature and art would never be found treated as the playthings of the rich, but as the possession of all, and that their influence might permeate the dwellings of the humblest citizens. (Applause.)

Mr. EDWIN WAUGH, who was very heartily received, responded to the toast. He was afraid that the speech to which they had just listened had taken all the wind out of his poor sails. There were many men round that hospitable board who could have acknowledged the toast in happier terms than himself, and his position reminded him of an incident which happened last week in an hotel at York, where he was staying at the time. One of the gentlemen who was staying at the hotel particularly requested the porter to call him up at six o'clock next morning. The porter forgot all about it, and the gentleman slept on and missed his train. Coming furiously down stairs at breakfast time, he rang for the porter and asked why he had not been called up at six o'clock. "I beg your pardon," the porter said, "I made a mistake ; but never mind, sir, I called two other men up who didn't want to get up." (Laughter.) Now at that moment he (Mr. Waugh) felt somewhat in the position of one of those two men. (Laughter.) But he supposed he must say something. As we looked around we found there was hardly a county in the kingdom which had not been remarkable for one or more men of eminence in art or letters or in science. Some of the counties had achieved what might be called a speciality in the character of their literature. And neither last nor least among them was

the county of Lancaster. Here there had been an unusual list of authors, some of whom had pushed their way up through the hard soil, like moorland flowers which grew without the aid of the cultivator, whilst many others were men of the greatest eminence, who had had all the advantages of school and college. They had with them that evening one of the finest existing literary links connecting past generations with the present. (Applause.) It was a pleasant thing thus to welcome the magician to the scenes of youth, around which his romantic genius had delighted to play during long years of absence from them. Mr. Harrison Ainsworth might well say in the words of Moore :—

> And doth not a meeting like this make amends
> For all the long years I've been wand'ring away,
> To see thus around me my youth's early friends,
> All smiling and kind as in that happy day?
>
> Although over some of your brows, as o'er mine,
> The snowfall of time may be stealing, what then?
> Like Alps in the sunset, thus lighted by wine,
> They'll wear the gay tinge of youth's roses again.

(Applause.)

Mr. J. Fox Turner proposed "The Lancashire Witches," and Dr. Ainsworth responded.

Mr. Wilkinson proposed "The Press," and gave an interesting sketch of the history of journalism in Manchester and London.

Mr. Edmund Yates, in responding to the toast, said that he had that evening the pleasure of making the acquaintance of after-dinner Manchester; and even in the midst of enjoyment, he would hazard the friendly criticism that though it was eloquent is was not concise. (Laughter.) One advantage of this he fully appreciated, as the time was so far advanced as to relieve him from any necessity of making a speech. (Laughter.) It had been a special pleasure to him to be there that night, and to see the way in which the town of Mr. Ainsworth's birth honoured the great Lancashire novelist, for he was not only a friend of many years' standing, but had been

a friend of his (Mr. Yates's) father before him. And that reminded him of a little incident which had never been publicly narrated before. Many years ago his hankerings after literature led to the production of an article which he sent to *Ainsworth's Magazine*. He need scarcely remark that this production was a poem. It was wholly original, and strikingly clever. (Loud laughter.) It was composed, he regretted to say, in church during the abstraction of a dull sermon. (Laughter.) Contrary to the supposed use and wont of editors, Mr. Ainsworth replied at once by letter, in which he spoke with much friendship of his (Mr. Yates's) father's son. Shortly after Mr. Ainsworth sent him a proof, and it had not been in his possession many minutes before he had carefully corrected all the stupendous blunders by which the printer had vainly striven to mar the perfection of that work of art. It was quickly corrected and quickly posted. He opened the next number of *Ainsworth's Magazine* with a trembling hand, but the poem was not there. (Laughter). It was not in the next number. He wrote to Mr. Ainsworth, but in vain. He wrote him begging letters, he wrote him threatening letters, but down to that very day the poem had never appeared. This dread secret had weighed upon him for a quarter of a century, and he thought this was a fitting opportunity of relieving his mind of the intolerable burden. (Laughter.) He would content himself with thanking them very cordially for the way in which they had drunk "The Press." The Mayor of Manchester had set a most praiseworthy example in this departure from the ordinary routine of civic feasts. He thought the example was one that ought to be imitated. A banquet with, it might be, something in the form of a testimonial, was a very pleasant way in which literature could be recognised. On the part of his colleagues of the press, he would say that they were ready, whenever called upon, to give up the name of their birthplaces to the mayors of the respective boroughs which had had the

honour of giving them birth whenever those dignitaries were prepared to follow the magnificent lead of the chief magistrate of the ancient town of Manchester. (Laughter and cheers.)

Mr. E. J. BROADFIELD proposed "The Mayor and Corporation of Manchester." He said that Manchester people had the privilege of being governed by the best local government in England, though probably few were aware of the immense labour and discrimination exercised in the administration of the affairs of this great city. (Hear, hear.) And he felt sure that the Mayor would have no more brilliant day recorded in the history of his mayoralty than that of the Banquet to Mr. Harrison Ainsworth. (Applause.)

The MAYOR, in responding, said he thanked them for the manner in which the toast had been received. He was obliged to them for their company that evening.

This concluded the list of toasts, and the company shortly afterwards broke up.

FROM THE "MANCHESTER EXAMINER."

THERE are some compliments which confer as much honour on those who pay them as on those to whom they are paid, and to this order belongs the felicitous mark of regard offered by the Mayor of Manchester to Mr. William Harrison Ainsworth. It is more blessed to give than to receive, and by that token the Lancashire folk who have been amused by a novelist versed in old Lancashire lore may say that the Mayor, by his happy thought, is entitled to the same credit that he desired to give to his celebrated guest. Every one who knows the character of the special services Mr. Baker has rendered to the municipality over which he presides will see at once an illustration of the fitness of things in the fact that he should be the host of a famous Lancashire romancer. Nothing could be more appropriate than that the Chairman of the Libraries Committee should ask a number of the representative writers and readers of Manchester to meet a writer whose agreeable inventions have interested readers for close on half a century. There are fashions in novels as in dress, but the interval between "Rookwood" and "Mervyn Clitheroe" is long enough to allow of fashions rising, dying out, and reviving; and we cannot affect to be surprised to hear from the Mayor that Mr. Ainsworth's works are still in active demand among the novel-reading public who take these books from the Free Libraries of Manchester. This is not the place, and happily it is not the time, to say anything of Mr. Ainsworth's place in English literature. Although at the close of his speech he expressed some doubt as to whether he would produce another tale, we may hope that he will, and thus give more material, and many years more of preparation to those who would always sooner write him a welcome

greeting than a critical biography. There is much, however, that may be said of Mr. Ainsworth which need not be or pretend to be an analysis of his manner, or the effect of it, or the reason of its popularity. The Mayor's guest may be said to have stood before the company invited to do him honour in a dual capacity. They wanted to claim him for the "Lancashire lad" he is; but they could not forget that he is a prominent member of the great, we might say the national, family of letters. The references he made in his modest address to his early works called up in the minds of the older of his hearers a whole host and a glorious host, of the writers who were his contemporaries at the beginning of his career. He must have begun his work about the time that "the wondrous boy who wrote 'Alroy'" began his. He was in the field before the most popular of the modern novelists began their maiden essays, and before some of them were born. He survives all his early compeers and rivals, as the last of the old Fraserians whom Maclise has sketched for us in immortal lines, as the doyen of the novelists of half a century, to come back to receive the hightest mark of regard that his native town could give him.

For the Mayor's hospitality was offered to Mr. Ainsworth on the ground mainly that he was a Manchester man, whose voluminous contributions to the literature of his country are distinguished for their vivid illustrations of Lancashire incidents and transitions. Thare are few men in these latter days who could solace themselves with the thought that they had never written a line which they would wish to blot. There are probably some of the early works of Mr. Ainsworth which he would wish, like Sterne's recording angel, to drop a tear on, and blot out for ever. Not that they were vicious, nor that they were works that were bad in art. There is, we confess, something still captivating in the narrative of Dick Turpin's ride, and in the story of Jack Sheppard's exploits; but the very fact that they maintain some interest over a mature mind only serves the more to illustrate the old

arguments directed against the mischievous influences they exercised on minds that were immature. But follies or no, these were the works of the *première jeunesse*, which were never repeated, and of all the works of which special mention was made at the Town Hall banquet it may be said that they are in their way admirable pictures of the Lancashire life of any time between a century and a century and a half ago. No man of Lancashire birth can fail to find interest, and, after all allowances are made for the liberties Mr. Ainsworth takes with history, we might say instruction, in the carefully amassed archæological details to be found in "Beatrice Tyldesley," "The Leaguer of Lathom," and "The Lancashire Witches," which, it is noteworthy, has given origin to an opera that was even, while the author of the story was speaking, being performed on the Liverpool stage. Nor in another work from the same pen will old Grammar School men have any difficulty in recognising a graphic description of the city in the long ago. There is little mystery about the identification of the novel which Mr. Ainsworth described as having something of an autobiographical character. It was as autobiographical, we may venture to say, as "Vivian Grey" or the recorded musings of Herr Teufelsdroch ; but in it, at all events, we have a vivid depiction of the scenes and events of the epoch, and full evidence both of the artistic care and the local patriotism which marked all the Lancashire novels of Mr. Ainsworth, and thoroughly earned for him the hearty testimonial that was offered him.

There are orders of knighthood of which a man is made free without a Royal accolade, and in their ranks Mr. Harrison Ainsworth will hold an honourable place. Yet it curiously illustrates a difference between the customs of our own country and those of others, that the first public proof of his knightly rank should take the form of a dinner. In many lands literature is, as it were, the avenue to public position. In the United States the literary men who have been assured by a popular vote

that they deserved well of their country have not, as a rule, been literary after the manner of Mr. Ainsworth. They have been journalists, though, possibly, none the less romancers in their different ways. They have been hard party fighters in the present time, and not narrators of the combats of the fascinating past. In France, however, the conditions have been different. There the quality of imagination is allied with, yet seemingly not impaired by, strong political predilections. A man writes a novel, and is made famous. Famous men become public men at once, and public men are draughted into the Legislature, or into the diplomatic service, or somewhere or other into prominent places. It is questionable whether such marks of appreciation are, on the whole, advantageous to literature, and whether, indeed, they do not work it harm ; but they are rewards which meritorious work in letters receives in the Latin nations. But in our colder clime, as a rule, the celebrated writer lives his own life, and likes it. There are few instances in which an eminent novelist has sought a seat in Parliament. Mr. Trollope, we believe, once did, but was unsuccessful. Thackeray, too, was not disinclined, if report may be trusted, to stand for Oxford University. Dickens, however, made up his mind that the business of politics and the business of literature were distinct and incompatible, though he did once enliven a literary address with a parenthetical remark that he had infinite faith in the people who were ruled, and no faith at all in the people who ruled them. The contrast between our usage and that of France or the United States becomes the stronger when we look through the lists of our diplomatic and consular agents in search of well-known literary names, and is not much less striking when we examine the lists of those who are privileged to wear a decoration. We have no order like that of the Legion of Honour ; and if we had, there are not many of our first-class men who would covet it. In some exceptional cases the special grace of the Crown is extended to letters, and a favourite

author is empowered by the Royal will to use a prefix to his name and call his wife a Lady. It does sometimes seem anomalous that while successful surgeons, clever inventors or enterprising Mayors have distinctions conferred on them as a matter of course, men whose names will live for ever in our literature have received no other honours, though they could not desire much higher, than were bestowed on them by hosts of admiring readers. It is in no spirit of criticism of the customs of the land that we make these remarks. Literature does not want to be made the subject of Court favour, or the recipient of political patronage. Its proudest rewards are those which come voluntarily from the public for which it works, and we suppose that until the end of time the most conspicuous mark of public regard any Chief Magistrate of an English town can pay to one whom the citizens delight to honour is to invite him to a complimentary banquet, and give him such a greeting as Mr. Harrison Ainsworth received on his visit to Manchester.

CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

SIR THOMAS STARKEY.

		PAGE
	I.	
The Neglected Wife		3
	II.	
Captain Darcy		15
	III.	
At Dieppe		26
	IV.	
The Challenge		34
	V.	
Aline		39
	VI.	
The Duel		53
	VII.	
How Sir Thomas Starkey's Last Letter was delivered		66
	VIII.	
Brereton Hall		74
	IX.	
Mildred Warburton		84

X. PAGE
Squire Warburton of Beaucliffe 93

XI.
Sir Randal de Blundevillle 104

XII.
Luncheon 111

XIII.
Stanley calls on his Solicitors 121

XIV.
Rose Hylton 127

XV.
Stanley receives a Letter from his Mother . 138

XVI.
A Ghost Story 144

XVII.
An unexpected Meeting in St. James's Park . 152

XVIII.
Tattersall's 163

XIX.
Richmond Park 171

XX.
A Declaration 181

XXI.
A Dinner at the Star and Garter . . . 191

XXII.
Mr. Brereton arrives in Town 200

XXIII.
A Dinner at Greenwich 210

XXIV.

PAGE

How Darcy was received next Morning . . 218

XXV.

Lady Starkey explains her Intentions in regard to Rose 226

XXVI.

The Ride in Rotten Row 236

XXVII.

A Lover lost and a lost Lover regained . . 245

STANLEY BRERETON.

SIR THOMAS STARKEY.

I.

THE NEGLECTED WIFE.

In the private parlour of the great banking house in the Strand, two of the partners were seated one morning, a few years ago, at a table covered with letters and accounts, most of which had been examined and put aside, but a few were left that required attention.

Both these gentlemen, though shrewd men of business, had easy, agreeable manners, and were remarkably courteous to all brought into contact with them. Mr. Moseley, the senior partner, who was rather stout, and rosy-cheeked, with grey hair, had a very pleasant expression of countenance; nor could anything be said against his partner, Mr. Vere, but the latter was decidedly the gravest of the two, and

had a very keen look when making an inquiry. They were discussing an important matter that had just come before them, when a lady and gentleman were ushered into the room by a clerk, and announced as Lady Starkey and Sir John Lambert.

The two bankers immediately arose, and shook hands with Sir John, who presented her ladyship to them, while the sedate clerk placed seats for the new-comers near the table.

Though no longer young, Lady Starkey was extremely handsome, and had a tall symmetrical figure, regular features of a proud cast, and fine, black eyes, that had lost none of their brilliancy. Her personal attractions were heightened by a very charming dress. No one, unacquainted with her history, would have imagined that such a beautiful woman could have been neglected; but Sir Thomas Starkey, it appeared, was a very indifferent husband.

Sir John Lambert, the friend by whom her ladyship was accompanied, was old enough to be her father—in fact, he had known her from childhood, and regarded

her almost as a daughter. She consulted him on all important occasions, and he gave the best advice he could. He had counselled the present visit to the bankers, as he thought some information which she desired respecting her husband could be obtained from them. The old baronet, we may mention, kept a good account at the house, and was consequently much esteemed.

As time was not to be wasted in that room, Sir John was about to explain what brought Lady Starkey there, when Mr. Moseley checked him.

"Before anything is said, Sir John," remarked the banker, "I ought to state that we have received a letter this very morning from Sir Thomas Starkey, giving us certain instructions, on which we shall be pleased to act."

"Have your instructions any reference to Lady Starkey, may I ask?" inquired Sir John.

"They have," replied Mr. Moseley. "We are requested to honour her ladyship's drafts to the extent of two thousand pounds, and were just about to write to her to that effect."

"This is singular," remarked Sir John.

"Entirely unexpected on my part," said Lady Starkey. "I did not suppose Sir Thomas had written to you, gentlemen," she added.

"There is his letter, if your ladyship desires to see it," said Mr. Vere, handing it to her.

A very brief communication indeed, and containing nothing more than the order mentioned.

Lady Starkey, however, glanced at the letter inquiringly, as if to search for some information, which she did not find.

"The letter is dated yesterday," she remarked to Sir John. "But no address is given."

"Indeed!" he exclaimed, taking the letter from her. "The address seems intentionally omitted. Allow me to see the envelope," he added, to Mr. Vere.

But the cautious banker, who was watching him, and guessed his motive, declined.

"It is no business of ours to furnish you with Sir Thomas Starkey's address, Sir John," he replied.

"Then am I to understand, gentlemen," said Lady Starkey, with a look of dis-

pleasure, that you refuse to inform me how I may communicate with my husband?"

"Any letter sent us by your ladyship shall be forwarded to him at once," said Mr. Vere, intimating very plainly that no more would be done.

Lady Starkey consulted Sir John Lambert by a look, but the old baronet shook his head, implying that it would be useless to pursue the inquiry further.

"We really know nothing of Sir Thomas's plans," said Mr. Moseley. "We beg your ladyship to clearly understand that you can communicate with him through us."

"You are very obliging, gentlemen," rejoined Lady Starkey, coldly. "But I don't think I shall trouble you."

"You may as well do a little business now you are here," said Sir John, smiling.

"Shall I write out a draft for your ladyship?" asked Mr. Moseley, "and for what amount?"

"Take the whole two thousand pounds," suggested Sir John. And he added *sotto voce*, "you can give it, if you like, to your niece, Rose Hylton."

"Do, by all means, if your ladyship wants the money," said Mr. Moseley.

"I don't want it," she replied.

"But you may as well have it," said the banker, quickly drawing out a cheque which he handed to her.

Lady Starkey hesitated for a moment, but at a look from Sir John signed the cheque.

Meantime the clerk had been summoned, and was ordered to get the cheque cashed at once.

"How will your ladyship have the money?" asked Mr. Moseley.

"In bank-notes—won't you?" interposed Sir John.

Lady Starkey assented, and the clerk departed on his errand.

"I hope this is quite agreeable to your ladyship?" observed Mr. Moseley, who fancied Lady Starkey did not look altogether satisfied.

"I really don't want the money, and would rather leave it with you," she replied.

"If such is your wish, it can be easily carried out," he said.

"Then I will leave it," she rejoined.

At this juncture the clerk returned with

a handful of bank-notes, which he was about to deliver to Mr. Moseley.

"Take back the notes," said the banker, "and let an account be opened forthwith with Lady Starkey."

The order was promptly obeyed, and after a little further conversation, her ladyship and Sir John were about to depart, when the greatest consternation was excited among the whole party by the sudden entrance of a tall, distinguished-looking individual.

"Why, bless my life! here's Sir Thomas Starkey in person!" said Mr. Moseley.

"My husband!" exclaimed Lady Starkey. "Let us be gone. I won't meet him."

"Stay where you are," said Sir John Lambert. "You can't avoid him now."

"Your ladyship needn't be alarmed," said Mr. Vere. "No scene can occur here."

Thus reassured, Lady Starkey did not move, while Sir Thomas stepped so quickly towards the table that the bankers could not stop him.

Sir Thomas, we have said, was tall, and we may add, that he was remarkably handsome, and had a military air.

He did not seem at all embarrassed, and

scarcely deemed it necessary to apologise for his sudden entrance into the banker's private room, but he gave a little explanation as to how he came there.

"Just now, as I was walking down the Strand," he said, "I noticed your ladyship's brougham at the door of the bank, and ascertained from the footman that you and Sir John Lambert had called there, and were still within. So, as I wanted particularly to see you, I determined to take advantage of the opportunity, went in at once, and found my way to this room."

"You don't seem aware that your presence is unwelcome, Sir Thomas, and that you are interrupting business," observed Mr. Moseley.

"You ought to have sent in a clerk to inquire whether you could be admitted," added Mr. Vere. "I am surprised they let you in."

"I did not ask permission," said Sir Thomas, coolly.

"Well, since you are here, it can't be helped," rejoined Mr. Moseley. "Pray take a seat."

But Sir Thomas declined.

"I shan't stay more than a minute," he said. "I conclude, gentlemen," he added, "that you have communicated the instructions given you to Lady Starkey?"

"All has been arranged," replied Mr. Moseley.

"And entirely to my satisfaction," added Lady Starkey.

"Then I can depart in comfort," said Sir Thomas.

"Where are you going?" inquired Lady Starkey, unable to repress her curiosity.

"I scarcely know," he replied, evasively.

"Will you write to me? May I write you?" she cried.

"Better not," he rejoined. "The less we hear from each other the better."

"Oh! don't say so, Sir Thomas," she exclaimed. "I shall be wretched unless I have a letter from you now and then."

"These gentlemen are sure to hear from me, and will let you know where I am, and how I am."

"Yes, yes—that must suffice," said Sir John Lambert. "You can't expect more."

"But I do expect a great deal more," she cried, despairingly. "Promise me you

will write before long!" she added to her truant husband.

"I can make no such promise," he rejoined, coldly.

"And I beg you not to press me to do what must needs be painful to me. Let us endeavour to forget each other."

"Impossible I can forget you, Sir Thomas," she cried.

"For your own sake—try," he rejoined. "But we are presuming on the patience of these gentlemen."

"You are in fault, Sir Thomas," said Mr. Vere. "You should not have sought this interview. You must have been sure it would greatly distress her ladyship, besides being against all our rules."

"Well, I will at once put an end to it, though I had more to say. Farewell, Kate."

And he hurried out of the room.

Lady Starkey, who had made no response to the valediction, looked as if she would faint.

"For Heaven's sake command yourself!" said Sir John, in a low tone to her. "Recollect where you are."

"Yes, I have not forgotten," she rejoined.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," she added. "My feelings have quite overcome me."

"We feel deeply for your ladyship," said Mr. Vere. "Sir Thomas was much to blame for the intrusion."

"Pray, pardon him!" said Lady Starkey. "He yielded to an irresistible impulse."

"I have no doubt of that," said Mr. Moseley.

"I wish he had finished what he had to say," sighed Lady Starkey. "Give me your arm, Sir John, and come with me to my carriage. Good day, gentlemen, I am extremely obliged by your kindness."

"We only regret that our interview, which began so pleasantly, did not terminate more agreeably," said Mr. Moseley, as he and his partner attended them to the door.

Supported by her old friend, her ladyship then took her departure.

"Upon my soul! I'm exceedingly sorry for her," said Mr. Vere, as he and his partner returned to the table. "I did not suppose she was so strongly attached to her faithless spouse."

"Yes, he doesn't deserve so charming a wife," said Mr. Moseley.

"How long has he left her?" asked Mr. Vere.

"More than a year," rejoined the other. "And in my opinion he'll never return. He's infatuated by that Mrs. Heyrick, who isn't to compare with her."

With a few more reflections of a similar kind, they resumed their work.

Meanwhile, Sir John and her ladyship had issued forth from the bank, and were met at the door by a footman, who conducted them to a very smart-looking brougham, furnished with a pair of spirited chestnuts.

"Come back with me to Berkeley-square. Sir John," said her ladyship, as she got into the carriage. "I want to talk to you."

The old baronet assented, and seated himself beside her.

Next moment, the coachman, whose portly person was displayed in a rich livery, having received orders from his fellow-servant to go home, dashed along the crowded thoroughfare.

II.

CAPTAIN DARCY.

Lady Starkey's house was not one of the largest in Berkeley-square, but it was one of the nicest.

On alighting, her ladyship dismissed the brougham, and took Sir John at once to her boudoir, which was the most charming little room imaginable, exquisitely furnished, containing sofas and chairs that could only have come from Paris, adorned with old china, knick-knacks of various kinds, and having some choice cabinet pictures on its walls.

Amongst the latter was a portrait of her fickle spouse, painted by an eminent French artist shortly after their union.

Without a doubt Sir Thomas was strikingly handsome at that period, and Lady

Starkey never contemplated his fine features without a touch of tenderness. Some people wondered why her ladyship did not put away that portrait, but it had been taken when Sir Thomas was really devoted to her, and she loved it on that account.

Once upon a time, a portrait of herself, in all the bloom of her beauty, hung beside it. But that portrait was gone.

Leaving the old baronet for a few minutes, she returned and sat down on a sofa beside him.

During the drive back from the bank very little conversation had taken place between them, for she felt unequal to the effort; but she had now, in some degree, regained her composure.

"I thought Sir Thomas looked very well this morning," she remarked. "How say you, Sir John?"

"I perceived very little difference in him," he replied. "But he looked somewhat older."

"I saw no change," said her ladyship. "That portrait might have been painted yesterday. The features are the same, though the expression is somewhat altered."

"I would advise you—as I have often

done before—to remove that portrait," he said.

"Never!" she exclaimed. "It is my greatest comfort. It always regards me with the same loving look."

"Which the original has long lost," said Sir John.

"I don't know," she rejoined. "I discerned some traces of the former expression in his countenance to-day."

"Mere fancy. Don't deceive yourself. Don't encourage any feeling of regard for him. It will only lead to further disappointment and distress. Sir Thomas will never return to you; I am certain of that, and it is better you should believe so than indulge any false hopes. Strive to forget him. That's the best advice I can give."

"I only talk about him to you, Sir John."

"I thought your lady's maid was your chief confidante?"

"Yes, I confess, I *do* talk to Thompson. But she is nobody."

"Pardon me! I am of opinion that Mrs. Thompson has more real influence with you than any one else."

"You are mistaken I assure you, dear

Sir John. I merely unburden my breast to her. She does not advise me. She soothes me."

"Very much the same thing," observed Sir John, shrugging his shoulders.

"I have had some difficulty lately with my cousin, Lionel Darcy," said Lady Starkey. "He was furiously enraged the other day by something he had heard of Sir Thomas, and declared he would call him to account. But I made him promise to keep quiet."

"Well, I must say your ladyship is the most amiable and forgiving of your sex."

"Not so! I could kill my rival, Mrs. Heyrick. But I would not injure Sir Thomas."

"Strange he should be insensible to your merits. I really don't think Mrs. Heyrick can compare with you."

"I hate her, but I cannot blind myself to her charms," said Lady Starkey. "She is very captivating and has completely enslaved my husband."

"Yes, there can be no doubt about that. I remember her as Aline Neville, before her marriage with old Heyrick. Then she was thought remarkably attractive, but not

half so much so as when she became a rich widow."

"People said at the time that you yourself proposed to her."

"And they spoke the truth; but she had several other offers besides mine. However, she preferred one whom she could not wed, and who sacrificed an incomparable wife for her sake."

"No more of this, Sir John. I cannot bear the recollection of that time. Never shall I forget the anguish I endured when I first discovered my husband's infidelity. But I did not reproach him."

"If anything could have moved him your forbearance must have done. But he was too much besotted."

"Prayers were of no avail. He was deaf to all my entreaties, and left me, as you are aware. Still, I would not consent to the divorce, which you and other friends proposed, but bore up in the hope that some day the truant would return. I would not absolutely shut the door against him."

"There is not a chance of your fond hopes being realised. You are dealing with an ingrate, who no longer cares for you. Take the step you have been advised.

It may be the means of restoring you to happiness."

"I will give him another year. If he has not returned by that time I will act as you recommend."

Just then the footman came in, and said that "Captain Darcy had called. Would her ladyship see him?"

"Certainly," she replied. "I am glad you are here, Sir John. Pray don't leave me."

Sir John nodded, and immediately afterwards Captain Darcy was shown into the room. As he advanced, he laid down his hat and cane.

He was tall, well made, and very handsome, almost as handsome as Sir Thomas Starkey, though in a different style, for the captain had light hair and blonde moustaches, and his eyes were blue. His age could not be more than five and twenty.

His manner now was very easy and agreeable, and it may be said with truth that he was a general favourite. Sir John, who knew him intimately, seemed very glad to see him.

"I have some news for your ladyship,

that I am sure will interest you," he said. "I have seen Sir Thomas."

"So have we!" cried both his hearers.

"Indeed!" exclaimed the captain, surprised. "Where, may I ask?"

"At his bankers. Where did you see him?"

"At our club. I had great difficulty in controlling myself, but I wouldn't make a scene, so I didn't go near him. However, I ascertained from Colonel Ratcliffe that he is living at Dieppe, so I can find him if I choose."

"But I trust you won't go in quest of him? You promised to leave him alone."

"True. But the sight of him has rekindled all my wrath. I should like to give him my opinion of his conduct."

"Perhaps you may think better of him when you learn that he has just presented me with two thousand pounds."

"Unsolicited, I hope," cried Darcy. "You have plenty of money."

"Entirely unsolicited," remarked Sir John. "Her ladyship only learnt what had been done when she called at the bankers."

"Why didn't you refuse the money?" said Captain Darcy, looking rather displeased.

"I shan't keep it myself," said Lady Starkey. "I mean to give it to my niece, Rose Hylton."

"I think her ladyship did quite right," said Sir John. "The best way to punish the offender is to take his money."

"I should like to punish him in another way," said Darcy, with a meaning look.

"Remember your promise, Lionel," said her ladyship. "No challenge, or you will forfeit all my regard."

"You must release me from that promise, *belle cousine*," cried the captain.

"Never," she rejoined. "I will have no fighting on my account. If you disobey me, you will take the consequences."

"You cannot blame my devotion," he said, evasively.

"I am afraid, from your manner, that you do meditate something," she said, with an anxious look. "But I tell you again, it mustn't be. If either of you fell in the encounter, I should ever reproach myself!"

"Don't make yourself uneasy," said

Darcy. "You have really nothing to fear."

"I suppose I must be content with that assurance?" she rejoined.

"I could say nothing more were I to talk for an hour. But we won't prolong the conversation. Are you going towards Pall Mall, Sir John?" asked the captain, rising.

The old baronet got up at once, and said he would accompany him.

They then took leave of her ladyship, who had hardly strength enough to ring the bell, and sank down on the sofa the moment they had quitted the room.

"I am certain Lionel and Sir Thomas will meet," she ejaculated. "And I have moreover a presentiment that my husband will be killed. What can I do to prevent the meeting?"

Leaving Lady Starkey to her painful reflections, we shall follow the two gentlemen to Pall Mall.

"Now, tell me, Darcy," said Sir John. "Do you really mean to call out Starkey?"

"I shall try. I've found out that he returns to Dieppe to-night, and shall follow

to-morrow with Colonel Ratcliffe, who has promised to accompany me. I shall affront him, and he cannot then refuse a meeting."

"Don't be afraid. Starkey is the last man to tolerate an affront. He is as hot-headed as yourself. But mind what you are about. Sir Thomas is a dead shot."

"I must take my chance," said Darcy, carelessly. "I'm not a bad shot myself. But understand me! I don't want to kill him—only to punish him."

"A mere rap on the elbow to make him drop his pistol—eh?"

"And own he has grievously wronged his wife. That he must do."

"Humph! I'm not so sure that he will do it," replied Sir John. "Well, no doubt, you have right and justice on your side, and that's something. Moreover, you'll have an excellent *témoin* in Colonel Ratcliffe. No mistake with him. He's a perfect gentleman. Everything will be well conducted."

"Of that I'm certain," said Darcy, as they stopped before the entrance of the Junior United Service Club. "Won't you come in?"

"No, thankee," replied the old baronet.

"I'd rather not be mixed up in this affair, as I might be. I shall call on Lady Starkey to-morrow. Shall I say anything to her?"

"Tell her all, and entreat her to pardon my disobedience."

Just as they were about to separate, a tall, fine-looking man came out of the club, and descending the steps, shook hands with the old baronet.

"I want Sir John to come in and have some luncheon," said Captain Darcy, "but he declines."

"I've just heard something that has taken away my appetite," said Sir John.

"Nothing wrong, I hope?" asked the colonel, staring at Darcy.

"Nothing whatever," replied the old baronet. "I hope all may come off well. I'll call a few days hence, and hear all about it."

"Supposing I'm alive at the time," replied Darcy, laughing.

And he entered the club with the colonel.

III.

AT DIEPPE.

NEXT day, late in the afternoon, Captain Darcy and Colonel Ratcliffe, who had just crossed in the steamer from Newhaven to Dieppe, and had been favoured with a very swift passage, took the way from the harbour to the Hôtel Royal.

Each had a cigarette between his lips, and they were preceded by a porter carrying their overcoats and valises.

On reaching the hotel, which was not very far off, their first business was to secure a couple of bedrooms, facing the sea, and having sent their scanty luggage upstairs, they ordered dinner at a later hour, and took the opportunity of inquiring of the *garçon* if he knew where Sir Thomas Starkey was to be found?

The information required was readily given. Sir Thomas occupied Bellevue, a very pretty villa close to the town. But they need not go there in search of him, for at this hour, he and madame were certain to be found at the Grand Café, the Casino, or on the *plage*. Sir Thomas had been at the Hôtel Royal that very morning to call on his friend, the Comte de Clairvaux, who was staying there, and they had gone out together. Perhaps the gentlemen had heard of the Comte de Clairvaux. He belonged to the *beau monde*, and was an *élégant* of the first rank.

"I have met him in society in London," observed Colonel Ratcliffe. "A very agreeable man, with very polite manners."

"The comte's description exactly," said the *garçon*. "He has come to Dieppe expressly to see his friend, Sir Thomas Starkey. Sir Thomas wished him to stay at the Villa Bellevue, but he preferred having a room here. I feel certain if *ces messieurs* will take a little promenade to the Casino, they will meet them and madame."

"How is madame looking?" asked the colonel.

"*Magnifique!*" exclaimed the *garçon*,

rapturously. "*Sans aucun doute la plus belle femme de Dieppe.*"

"Then you are rather badly off for beauty, it seems," remarked Captain Darcy.

"Pardon, monsieur, we never had so many handsome women in Dieppe as now," rejoined the *garçon*, "and such I am sure will be your opinion when you have looked about you."

"Shall we go forth and reconnoitre?" said the colonel to his friend.

"I was about to propose a stroll," replied Darcy.

Dieppe could not have been seen to greater advantage than on that bright and pleasant afternoon. The picturesque old castle on the cliff overlooking the town with its tall sugar-loaf towers and bridge, had nothing gloomy about it, and seemed merely built to protect the Casino and the baths on the *plage* beneath.

As it chanced to be market-day, the streets were full of Norman *paysannes* in their tall caps and quaint costumes, and as the *garçon* had asserted a great many pretty women were to be seen with a vast number of smart attendants; but Captain Darcy could not discover the persons he sought.

However, they were not very far off, and if he had entered the Grand Café, in the main street, instead of the Casino, he would have found them.

There they were—madame and the two gentlemen—seated at a small table in the inner room, chatting gaily, and eating ices.

Certainly, madame's charms had not been exaggerated, and on looking at her no wonder could be felt that she held Sir Thomas in thrall.

Cast in an exquisite mould, her delicate features were lighted up by eyes of tenderest blue. Her complexion was ravishingly fair, and her tresses golden. Her figure was slight and graceful, and the pretty sea-side costume she had adopted suited her admirably.

With Sir Thomas's appearance we are already familiar, so we need not describe him. But he certainly looked more at ease than he did at the bank in the Strand.

The Comte de Clairvaux was a very brilliant personage, and had an air of great distinction.

Though he could not be called young, he was remarkably well-preserved. Not a single grey hair could be detected amid

his dark and still luxuriant locks, and no lorgnon, hanging from his neck, proclaimed that his sight was failing him. He was slightly inclined to *embonpoint*—but no one thought him too stout—and was attired in the last Paris fashion.

But it was the comte's manner that chiefly excited admiration. So easy and agreeable was he, that all with whom he came in contact were charmed. Faults he had, no doubt; but people were so fascinated by his manner that they entirely overlooked them.

Sir Thomas Starkey, we need scarcely say, liked him exceedingly, and often consulted him when he wanted advice. It was at his suggestion that Sir Thomas had first paid over the large sum we have mentioned to Lady Starkey. The comte thought it the proper thing to do, and Sir Thomas agreed with him, and did it.

"I'm sure you must feel better satisfied with yourself, *mon cher*, since you have made her ladyship this pretty present, than when you took no notice of her," said the count. "She cannot now complain that you give her nothing."

"She has a larger income than I have

myself," rejoined Sir Thomas; "and I have left her in undisturbed enjoyment of it. It is not my fault, as you are aware, that the bonds that tie us together are not broken."

"No, no—I know that—and think her very foolish—very foolish indeed. But as you are still linked together, and likely to remain so, you are bound to show her every consideration — particularly as you have experienced no annoyance from her."

"We know why her ladyship won't separate from Sir Thomas," said madame.

"She is influenced by mixed feelings," rejoined the comte. "Jealousy of you, and attachment to her husband."

"She is very provoking," cried madame. "Can't we force her to separate?"

"I'm afraid not, dearest Aline," said Sir Thomas. "She won't come to any terms. But her patience must be worn out in time, when she finds I won't leave you."

"Leave me!" she exclaimed, looking at him. "That could never be."

"Don't alarm yourself, dearest Aline. The passion I felt for you from the first is entirely unabated. The count can bear witness——"

"That you rave about her continually—I am sure you were wretched when you went to London, though you were scarcely absent a couple of days."

"You are right, *mon ami*, I was miserable; and never more enchanted than when I got back again."

"Well, I hope nothing will occur to disturb your happiness," said the count.

"Nothing is likely to do so," cried Aline. "We only live for each other."

At this moment two tall personages—evidently Englishmen—entered the *café* and looked around.

"There he is," said the foremost to his companion. "We have found him at last."

"And madame as well," replied the other. "That is the Comte de Clairvaux with them."

"By Jove! that's lucky," said Darcy. "Perhaps, he may act as Sir Thomas's second."

"Not unlikely," replied the colonel. "What will you do? You won't go into that room I suppose? Shall I ask Sir Thomas to step out and speak to you?"

"That will be the best plan. The place is clear. Everybody is outside just now."

The entrance of the new-comers had not passed unnoticed by those in the inner room. Sir Thomas recognised them both, and wondered how they came there; Aline felt alarmed, she knew not why; and the Comte de Clairvaux regarded them with a certain curiosity, for he remembered having met Colonel Ratcliffe in London.

But all were surprised when the colonel entered the room, and bowing to the party, addressed Sir Thomas.

"Captain Darcy wishes to have a word with you, Sir Thomas," he said.

"Excuse me for a moment, comte," replied Starkey, rising.

IV.

THE CHALLENGE.

DARCY, who had moved on one side, bowed stiffly as Sir Thomas came up.

"You may possibly guess what has brought me here, Sir Thomas?" he said, in a low, stern voice. "You must have heard my opinion of your treatment of my cousin—your much injured wife. I have come to call you to account."

For a moment Sir Thomas looked surprised, but the expression of his countenance quickly became as menacing and haughty as that of Darcy himself.

"I do not see what right you have to demand an account from me, sir," he said.

"I am your wife's nearest male relation," replied Darcy; "and her wrongs have touched me deeply. Do not force me to

give you my opinion of your conduct, and tell you in Colonel Ratcliffe's presence what I think of you!"

"You have said quite enough," rejoined Sir Thomas, with difficulty repressing his anger. "I will not disappoint you. We will settle the matter as soon as you please."

"Let it be to-morrow morning, then, at an early hour," said Darcy. "Shall we meet here—at Dieppe?"

"It will suit me better than elsewhere," replied Sir Thomas. "We can easily find a suitable spot on the road to the Château d'Arques. Pistols, of course."

"Of course," replied Darcy, "you will have already conjectured that my friend, Colonel Ratcliffe, will act for me?"

Sir Thomas bowed to the colonel.

"I have a friend with me here—the Comte de Clairvaux—on whom I can rely," he said.

"I have the honour of knowing the count," observed the colonel, "and shall be well pleased to act with him."

Just then the count came from the inner room, and saluted the new-comers.

"Pardon my interruption," he said to

Sir Thomas. "I am sent to see what you are about."

"You are come most *à propos*," replied the other, hastily explaining what had occurred.

"I feared something had happened," said the count, "and so did madame. Of course, you may command my services. But is it too late for an amicable arrangement? If Colonel Ratcliffe will lend his aid, I shall be delighted to assist."

"The attempt would be quite useless, count," replied the colonel, glancing at his principal, and receiving no encouragement. "The affair *must* go on. We can meet by-and-by at the Hôtel Royal, where we know you are staying."

Formally saluting Sir Thomas and his friend, the two officers departed.

Sir Thomas then flew to madame, who sprang to meet him.

"For Heaven's sake what has happened?" she cried. "Don't attempt to deceive me! I must, and will, know the truth. Those two officers were Colonel Ratcliffe and Captain Darcy. I recognised them at once. Darcy has come to challenge you, I am certain."

"I cannot contradict you," replied Sir Thomas, trying to force a smile.

"Have you accepted the challenge?" she cried.

"Ask the count," he rejoined.

"Sir Thomas could not do otherwise, madame," said De Clairvaux. "He could not refuse."

"If he is killed, as he may be, I shall die!" she exclaimed.

"Poh!" cried Sir Thomas, endeavouring to laugh the matter off. "Duels are never fatal now-a-days. We shall meet and have a shot at each other, that's all!"

"Perhaps a trifling hurt, nothing more," added the count.

"I wish I could think so," said Aline. "But I have a great misgiving."

"I myself have fought three duels, madame," remarked the count, "and have never yet killed an adversary nor got wounded myself."

"You have been lucky indeed, count," cried Aline. "I hope Sir Thomas may be equally lucky to-morrow."

"Doubt it not, madame," said the count.

"We must now go home," said Sir Thomas. "I have a few things to arrange."

"I will follow those gentlemen to the Hôtel Royal," said the count, "and will come to you afterwards."

"Good," replied Sir Thomas.

And they quitted the *café*.

V.

ALINE.

Sir Thomas Starkey kept a very good establishment at the Villa Bellevue, all his household being French. The *chef de cuisine* was an artist in his way.

Though hired, there was not a handsomer carriage in Dieppe, nor a finer pair of horses than those driven by Sir Thomas.

Madame had a very pretty *femme de chambre*, named Georgette, who was devoted to her, and thought her perfect.

As the Villa Bellevue was charmingly furnished, its occupants had everything they could desire, and ought to have been exceedingly comfortable.

On their return from the promenade, which had ended so disagreeably, Louis, the valet, received them, and noticed that

his master looked unusually grave and preoccupied, but did not venture a remark.

Proceeding at once to the salon, Sir Thomas flung himself into a *fauteuil*, and madame, fancying he wished to be alone for a short time, left him, and went to her *cabinet de toilette*, where she found Georgette.

"Madame has not her usual smile," said the pretty *femme de chambre*, regarding her anxiously. "I hope nothing has occurred to disturb her."

"Yes, a great deal has occurred, Georgette," replied her mistress, seating herself. "I have been very much agitated. Give me some eau de Cologne."

Georgette hastened to obey the order.

"May I venture to inquire what has happened, madame?" she asked, with an increased appearance of solicitude, as she steeped her mistress's handkerchief in the spirit.

"Something terrible has happened, Georgette. I am sure you will sympathise with me and pity me."

"What is it, in Heaven's name, madame?"

But her mistress could not reply, being half suffocated by emotion.

Georgette had never before seen her so much moved, and was quite frightened.

By-and-by, her mistress partially recovered

"What will you say, Georgette," she cried in broken accents, "when I tell you Sir Thomas is about to fight a duel?"

"*Mon dieu!* is it only that?" exclaimed the *femme de chambre*, who had anticipated something far more dreadful. "Be of good courage, madame. I have no fear for my master. Sir Thomas is a very gallant gentleman. He is sure to kill his adversary."

"I hope your words may come true, Georgette."

"Do not doubt it, madame; I never yet saw the man likely to prove a match for Sir Thomas."

"I have no doubt of Sir Thomas's courage and skill. But fortune may declare against him."

"Fortune always declares for the brave, madame. You will welcome him back a victor. May I ask when the duel takes place?"

"To-morrow morning early."

"Then my first prayer to the Virgin shall be for him, madame; and doubt not you will have good news."

"You give me fresh spirits, Georgette," cried her mistress. "I will now go to Sir Thomas."

"First, allow me to arrange your toilette a little, madame."

This done, Aline descended to the salon, where she found Sir Thomas in the act of folding up a letter.

"Am I interrupting you?" she asked.

"No, I have just done," he replied, putting the letter into his breast pocket.

"May I ask to whom you have been writing?" she said.

"I can't tell you," he replied. "But the letter will never be delivered, unless I fall. Come and sit down by me," he added, placing a chair opposite him, and taking her hands in his own.

"For a few minutes they gazed at each other in silence; their breasts filled with unutterable thoughts.

At last Sir Thomas spoke, in a low, tender voice.

"Heaven cannot—will not—part two

beings so devoted to each other as we are," he murmured.

"Oh! no—no—no!" she cried. "Many years of happiness, I doubt not, are in store for us."

"I only wish we were wedded, dearest Aline," he said. "My breast would then be lightened, and a dying pang spared me."

"You will escape that pang, dear Sir Thomas," she cried, clasping his hand to her heart. "I am sure you will. I should not be able to sit here, if I did not believe so."

"No doubt, I deserve some punishment," he continued, in a very grave tone; "and, unless I am mercifully dealt with, I shall not escape it."

"You terrify me, dear Sir Thomas," she cried. "I never heard you talk thus before."

"Gloomy thoughts rush upon me unbidden," he rejoined, "and I must perforce give utterance to them. What has brought this hot-headed fellow here? Personally, I have given him no offence. Nor is there any reason why he should espouse Lady Starkey's cause. Yet he comes here on a

sudden, to challenge me to mortal combat, and I cannot avoid him."

"You are not forced to meet him."

"As a man of honour, I am bound to accept his challenge, and give him a chance of taking my life."

"Still, you might have refused to fight."

"True, but I should have despised myself had I done so. No; I had no option. But it does seem hard — desperately hard — to leave one I love best in the world, and forfeit all the enjoyments of life, merely because a quarrelsome fool like Captain Darcy is displeased with my conduct, and chooses to constitute himself his cousin's champion."

"I believe he is in love with her himself," said madame, "and wants to get rid of you. Disappoint him."

"I will, if I can, depend upon it."

"Have no consideration for him. He has sought this encounter; let him take the consequences. In my opinion, you grant him too much in giving him a chance of shooting you. But don't let him carry out his design."

"He shall not! He shall not!" cried Sir Thomas, springing to his feet with a changed

expression of countenance. "You have roused me."

"I am glad of it," she rejoined. "Keep as you are now, and all will be well."

"I must go and look at my pistols," he said. "I have not seen them for a month. I fancied I should have no further use for them, but you see how one may be mistaken. The case is in my dressing-room. Come with me?"

"On no account," she replied, with a shudder.

"They will prove my protection," laughed Sir Thomas, as he quitted the room.

When he returned, in a few minutes, he found the Comte de Clairvaux with madame.

"Well, I have been to the Hôtel Royal, and have arranged all with Colonel Ratcliffe," he said; "according to French rules, you ought to have two *témoins* each; but in your case, one each may suffice. You are to meet at six to-morrow morning at a convenient spot about two miles from Dieppe on the road to the Château d'Arques."

Sir Thomas expressed his approval of the arrangement.

"To prevent any mistake," pursued the count, "the colonel and myself have agreed that our respective carriages shall set out for the place of rendezvous at the same time. We are to go first, and if you see no objection can take the surgeon with us."

"All right," said Sir Thomas.

"We shall hope to be back again long before madame comes down to breakfast," said the count.

"I trust to see you safe and sound," she replied, looking very pale, but maintaining her composure.

"Since all is settled," said Sir Thomas, "let us dismiss the matter altogether. What say you to a drive before dinner, count? I am sure madame will not object."

"On the contrary, I very much approve," she replied. "The evening is fine, so we can take a long drive, and dine late."

The count was charmed with the proposal, which just suited him. Accordingly, the *calèche* was ordered, and was very soon at the door. It was a very smart turn-out, and would have done no discredit to Hyde Park.

They took the road to the Château d'Arques, and when about half-way there

the count spoke to the coachman, and bade him mark the spot, as he would have to bring his master and himself there next morning at six o'clock.

Grégoire, the coachman, touched his hat, promising strict attention to the order.

No need to fix the spot on his memory, for he knew it well, and had often halted there to allow those whom he conducted to walk on the smooth, level turf.

Close to the road was an old oak of great size, and at the other side of the plain rose a mound, which visitors usually ascended.

As will be seen, it was a convenient place of rendezvous for the meeting on the morrow.

"Can you guess why the gentlemen are coming out so early in the morning, Baptiste?" observed the coachman, in a low tone, to the groom. "If not, I'll tell you. Our master, Sir Thomas, is about to fight a duel."

"I shouldn't wonder," replied Baptiste.

"I'm certain of it," said the other. "And the Comte de Clairvaux is to be his *témoin*."

"Very likely you're right, Grégoire. If such should be the case, I hope they'll bring

me with them. I should like, of all things, to witness a duel."

"Provided no harm ensues," observed the coachman.

"That's understood," rejoined the other.

After spending half an hour very agreeably at the Château d'Arques, where they found several English and American ladies and their attendants examining the picturesque ruins, and admiring the charming view of the Valley of the Bethune, they returned.

While passing the little plain, bordered by the old oak, and distinguished by the mound, Aline became very pale, and had great difficulty in repressing her emotion.

But by the time they reached the Villa Bellevue, she had regained her composure.

A capital dinner, that did great credit to the *chef*, awaited them. Sir Thomas seemed in unusually good spirits, but Aline thought his gaiety assumed.

The Comte de Clairvaux didn't stay late, but had a few words in private with Sir Thomas before his departure.

"The carriage will come to the Hôtel Royal for you soon after five in the morn-

ing," said Sir Thomas, as he shook hands with him. "*Au revoir!*"

The count returned for a moment to say good night to madame.

"We shall meet at breakfast to-morrow morning," he said, as he took leave of her.

Sir Thomas had previously given some directions respecting the surgeon to Louis, and the valet now informed him that his wishes would be attended to.

"Grégoire is without, Sir Thomas," continued Louis, "and desires to know whether you have any further commands for him."

"To prevent mistake, I will repeat my orders," said Sir Thomas. "At five o'clock, he is to take the *calèche* to the Hôtel Royal, and wait for the Comte de Clairvaux, with whom he will return here. By that time, no doubt, the surgeon will have arrived, and I myself shall be ready to set out. You will call me at five o'clock."

One question more, which the valet ventured to put. Was he to accompany his master?

"No; you will remain here to attend upon madame, in case she should require your services," replied Sir Thomas. "Baptiste will go with the coachman."

Greatly disappointed, Louis withdrew.

Just then, madame, who had left the salon for a short time, returned.

"Have you anything more to say to me, Sir Thomas?" she inquired.

"Yes; something rather important," he replied; "and I must mention it now. Perhaps the subject may not be pleasant," he added, taking her hand, and holding it in his own, as he went on; "but you must bear with me. You know that my nearest male relative is Stanley Brereton, my sister's son."

"I have never seen your nephew, Stanley Brereton, though I have much wished to meet him. But you have often told me he is very handsome, and a favourite of yours."

"I used to see a great deal of him at one time; but of late—owing to circumstances—a coolness has taken place between myself and my sister, Mrs. Brereton, and we have not met—not even corresponded."

"I fear I am the cause of the estrangement."

"Never mind. Mrs. Brereton, you are aware, is a widow. Her husband, who was a clergyman, and had a small living in

Cheshire, died several years ago, and left her rather poorly off. I used to make her an allowance, but it has been discontinued of late."

"I am sorry to hear that," said Aline. "She will attribute the change to me."

"Stanley, I am informed, resents my conduct to his mother, and says I have behaved very badly. If I have, I intend to make reparation. I have left a thousand a year to my sister, and the rest of my property to her son."

"You have done quite right," said Aline, approvingly.

"I have not mentioned you in my will, which has been made quite recently, but you will understand my motive," continued Sir Thomas. "You have plenty of money."

"Plenty!" she cried. "I don't want more. Neither does your wife, for she has a good fortune of her own."

"She must be content with the sum I have just given her," said Sir Thomas. "She will get no more from me. This is what I wished to tell you, dearest Aline. In case of my death, Stanley Brereton will be my heir, but he won't succeed to the

baronetcy, since he is not in the patent. I am glad you approve of what I have done, for I believe it is for the best."

"I think so too," she replied, regarding him earnestly. "But you seem to have a strong presentiment of ill."

"If I fall to-morrow, I shall not die unprepared," he replied.

"Now listen to *me*," said Aline. "Should your fears be realised, I shall retire from the world, and pass the remainder of my days in a religious retreat."

"You must not think of such a thing, dearest Aline. You are young, beautiful, rich. You will repent the step."

"I will take it," she cried, in a resolute tone. "Not all you can say will dissuade me. But I trust I may be spared the trial."

"I did not think you loved me so much!" he said; "but you ought not to make such a sacrifice for me."

"What should I have to live for, if you were gone?" she cried, flinging her arms round his neck.

Sir Thomas could make no reply, but strained her to his breast.

VI.

THE DUEL.

NEXT morning at five o'clock, Louis came to call his master.

But Sir Thomas had long been astir, and had nearly completed his toilette.

Moreover, he had written a couple of letters, respectively addressed to his sister, Mrs. Brereton, and his nephew, Stanley.

Both these letters were sealed with black wax, and laid on a small table.

Sir Thomas pointed them out to the valet, telling him they were not to be posted till his return.

Louis seemed to comprehend his master's meaning, but he made no remark.

The letter written by Sir Thomas on the previous afternoon had been put by him in a drawer, but he now replaced it in his breast pocket.

After addressing a brief prayer to Heaven he quitted the room, taking nothing with him, for he had already entrusted his *fourreau des pistolets* to Louis.

On stepping forth upon the landing he was quite surprised to find Aline waiting for him.

Wrapped in a *peignoir*, she looked as if she had not slept during the night.

"Why have you disturbed yourself?" he cried, embracing her.

"I wanted to see you before you set out on your terrible errand," she rejoined, regarding him tenderly.

"Don't call it a terrible errand!" he cried. "I shall come back quite safely. I have no misgivings whatever. But do not let us prolong the interview."

And printing a kiss on her brow, he hastened down the staircase.

He was not aware that Georgette had been watching him from the partly opened door of her mistress's room.

"Success attend him!" cried the *femme de chambre*, now coming forth. "I am delighted to have seen him. He looks very well."

"You must now finish dressing me as

quickly as you can, Georgette," said her mistress, returning to her room.

"Then madame keeps to her design, and means to be present at the meeting?" said the *femme de chambre.*

"I mean to witness it," replied Aline. "You have told Louis to order another carriage?"

"I have given him exact orders, madame, and he is sure to attend to them. The second carriage will be here as soon as the first is gone. But what will Sir Thomas say to this step, madame? Have you reflected?"

"I'm afraid he'll be very angry. But I must go."

The *femme de chambre* shrugged her shoulders, and feeling that remonstrance would be useless, she followed her mistress into the dressing-room, where she quickly completed her early toilette.

Just then, the sound of carriage wheels was heard, and looking from the window of the apartment, which commanded the drive to the villa, they beheld the *calèche* with the Comte de Clairvaux seated in it. He was presently joined by Sir Thomas and the surgeon, M. Martin.

The latter was an intelligent-looking young man, and had a case of instruments under his arm.

He got in first, and sat with his back to the horses.

Sir Thomas followed, bringing the pistol-case with him. He shook hands with the count, who looked in very good spirits, and introduced the surgeon to him.

Having shut the carriage door, Baptiste sprang to the side of the coachman, who instantly drove off.

"Well, I have my wish," observed the groom to his companion.

"True," replied the other, "but I suspect Louis will be there as well."

Baptiste wanted to know something more, but the coachman did not care to enlighten him.

As soon as the *calèche* had started, Aline descended to the salon followed by Georgette.

They had not to wait long before Louis entered to say that the *coupé* had arrived. Madame quickly took her place in it, and was followed by Georgette.

Louis went with them, though he was

afraid Sir Thomas would blame him, if he found out what had been done.

They had not gone far when they descried two carriages in advance,—the first evidently containing Sir Thomas and his friends, and the second—a landau—being occupied by Colonel Ratcliffe and Captain Darcy.

Louis took care to keep at a respectful distance from these vehicles.

The morning was exceedingly beautiful, and the view of Dieppe with its old castle, as beheld from many points, with the sea spreading out before it, and glittering in the early sunbeams, formed a lovely prospect.

Aline was in no mood to enjoy the fair scene; but Georgette could not contain herself, and uttered frequent exclamations of delight. Even the screaming of the sea-gulls sounded like music in her ears.

Ere long the *coupé* stopped, and Louis presented himself at the window.

"My master's carriage has arrived at the place of rendezvous, madame," he said, "and has entered the ground. The landau is about to follow. What shall we do?

The coachman thinks we had better stop at the old oak."

"Bid him choose his own place," replied madame; "but he must be careful to keep out of sight."

The *coupé* then went on with its deeply-excited occupants, and was soon behind the huge old tree, which partially sheltered it from view.

But this position did not suit Aline. She could not distinguish what was going on, for the occupants of the other carriages had alighted and were walking to the further side of the plain. Calling to Louis to open the door, she got out, and was followed by Georgette.

By this time the poor lady was scarcely under self-control, and paying no heed to anything said to her, she hurried off towards the intending combatants, and must infallibly have betrayed herself, if Georgette had not seized her arm, and restrained her.

"For Heaven's sake, stop, madame?" cried the latter. "Sir Thomas will be distracted at the sight of you, and will never be able to take aim properly."

Thus conjured, Aline obeyed.

Luckily, all concerned in the approach-

ing conflict were too much interested in it to notice her. Even their attendants had eyes for nothing else.

On alighting from his carriage, Sir Thomas, after a brief consultation with the Comte de Clairvaux, moved to the further side of the plain. They were accompanied by the surgeon, who walked a little behind them.

The count had taken possession of the pistol-case, having been informed that the arms within it were ready for use. Nothing had to be done but take them out of the box.

Sir Thomas looked perfectly calm, and had conversed quite cheerfully during the drive to the ground.

"Have you any directions to give me, *mon chèr ami?*" asked the count as they stopped. "Any message to convey to madame?"

"Yes, there is a letter here," he replied, touching his breast, "which I wish to be delivered to her, in case I cannot take it back with me."

"I will give it to her myself," replied the count. "That I promise you."

By this time Captain Darcy and his

friend had likewise alighted, and were making their way towards the spot.

A groom, who attended them, followed close behind with a case of pistols.

On approaching, Darcy, who looked very well, and totally free from uneasiness, courteously saluted his adversary, who bowed in return.

Salutations were likewise exchanged by the seconds, after which a momentary conference took place between them.

"The quarrel cannot be arranged, I find, gentlemen," said the colonel. "The duel must go on."

"Certainly. We have not come here merely for a drive," replied Sir Thomas. "Let there be no needless delay," he added to the colonel.

"There shall be none," replied the other. "We are as anxious to get the business settled as soon as you can be."

In another minute the pistols were produced, and each man was furnished with a weapon that had previously been carefully examined.

The ground was next measured, and the parties placed at the proper distance.

While this was going on, the intending

combatants watched each other narrowly, but neither could discern any traces of misgiving in his opponent.

It may be that Captain Darcy treated the affair more lightly than Sir Thomas. But the seconds did not think he had the best chance.

On the contrary, they deemed it highly probable that his stern-looking antagonist would shoot him.

Next minute, the signal was given. Both parties fired simultaneously.

At first it was thought neither was hit. But after maintaining his erect position for a brief space, Sir Thomas fell backwards to the ground.

The count and the surgeon were hastening to his assistance, when a loud shriek was heard, and a half-distracted lady rushed to the spot and flung herself down beside him.

"Sir Thomas! dearest Sir Thomas!" she cried, slightly raising his head. "Look at me! 'tis I!—'tis Aline!"

At the sound of that voice the wounded man opened his eyes, and a scarcely-perceptible smile lighted up his deathly features, but he could not speak.

The surgeon now came up, and tore up his shirt, which was stained with blood that oozed from a wound in the left breast.

"Is the wound mortal?" cried Aline, looking on with terror.

"I hope not, madame," replied the surgeon, not daring to tell her the truth.

"Don't attempt to deceive me!" she cried. "I know it is. Can you give him any restorative? He wishes to say something to me."

"It would be useless to offer him a restorative, madame," replied the surgeon, "he could not swallow it."

The dying man now made a last effort to speak, but could only give utterance to the sad word, "Farewell!"

Sinking backwards, he then expired.

Aline looked the picture of anguish and despair, but did not faint.

Seeing what had happened, Georgette, who had remained at a little distance, now flew to the spot, and aided the surgeon to render assistance to the unhappy lady.

The Comte de Clairvaux likewise joined the little group round the body.

"Is my dear friend, Sir Thomas, really

gone?" he inquired of the surgeon, in accents of deepest concern.

"Alas! Yes, Monsieur le Comte," replied the other, in a low voice. "And I am very much afraid of the effect of the scene upon madame. We must get her away from this place as quickly as we can."

"'Tis a great pity she came here," muttered the count.

"'Twas her love for Sir Thomas that brought her," said Georgette. "Pray don't blame her, Monsieur le Comte!"

Suddenly, and quite unexpectedly, Aline seemed in some degree to recover her strength.

Bidding the surgeon and Georgette retire she knelt down and prayed fervently—most fervently—for the soul of him who had just departed.

Her prayer finished, she said in low earnest tones:

"Hear me, gracious Heaven! I register a vow to retire altogether from the world, and devote the remainder of my life to acts of piety and devotion."

She then kissed the dead man's cheek, and bade him an eternal farewell.

The count, who had waited for the fitting moment, now prayed her to let him take her to her carriage

She thanked him, and was moving slowly away when Captain Darcy, who, with Colonel Ratcliffe, had been watching the touching scene, approached, and said in accents of apparently deep sympathy :

"Do not blame me too severely, madame, but accept my solemn assurance that I did not mean to kill Sir Thomas."

Aline regarded him scornfully and incredulously.

"Go back and tell your cousin what you have done," she said. "No doubt she will thank you."

"You are mistaken, madame," replied Darcy. "Lady Starkey did not wish me to fight this duel, and would have prevented me, if she could. She will be greatly shocked at the result."

"I refuse to believe it," replied Aline, departing slowly with the count.

They were followed closely by Georgette, who was ready to assist her mistress in case of necessity.

The poor lady made no reply to the words of consolation offered her by the

count, but thanked him earnestly as he placed her in the *coupé*; praying him to return to the ground, and see that all needful was done for his unfortunate friend.

"Doubt it not, madame," he replied. "I will bring him myself to the Villa Bellevue."

He then hastened back.

Louis, who had been greatly shocked by the tidings of the tragic event, placed Georgette beside her unhappy mistress, mounted the box, and ordered the coachman to drive home.

VII.

HOW SIR THOMAS STARKEY'S LAST LETTER WAS DELIVERED.

THE pretty villa, usually so gay, seemed entirely changed, as its afflicted mistress drove up to the door.

During the drive back, she had neither spoken a word nor shed a tear, but her fixed expression of countenance greatly alarmed Georgette, who would far rather have seen her indulge in a passionate outburst of grief than continue in this state.

But if the exterior of the house looked gloomy in Aline's eyes, the interior seemed far more so.

She entered the pleasant salon, where she was accustomed to sit with Sir Thomas, and where everything reminded her of him; and after taking a few steps within the

room, stood still, looking the very picture of despair.

"Be comforted, dearest madame!—pray be comforted!" said Georgette, who had followed her.

"Talk not to me of comfort, Georgette," she exclaimed, in accents of bitterest distress. "I have lost him! He has gone from me for ever. Never again shall I behold him in the chair where he used to sit!" she added, springing towards it, "Never! never!"

Almost overcome herself, Georgette made another effort to console her mistress.

"Try not to think of him, madame!" she cried, scarcely knowing what to say.

"Impossible!" exclaimed the other. "I shall never cease to think of him. I shall always look for him in this room."

"Yes, I feel it will always be associated with him, madame. But pray leave it now!"

Aline yielded to her attendant's entreaties, and went up-stairs.

Sinking down upon a couch, she remained almost in a state of insensibility, till she was roused by sounds that she could not misunderstand.

Evidently the body of Sir Thomas was being carried to the adjoining chamber.

She rose, but did not go forth, dreading the effect of the painful spectacle upon her, when Georgette entered with a letter in her hand.

"The Comte de Clairvaux has brought you this letter, madame," said the attendant.

"It is from Sir Thomas!" cried Aline. "I saw him folding up the letter, but was not aware it was meant for me."

"The comte bade me say that he took it himself from his unfortunate friend's breast," said Georgette. "Madame will see it is stained with blood."

"Sir Thomas's life-blood," cried Aline, scarcely daring to touch the missive.

At last she summoned up all her resolution and opened the letter.

"Shall I leave the room, madame?" asked Georgette.

"No; remain with me," rejoined her mistress.

For some moments her sight failed her, but at last she read as follows:

"This letter is to bid you an eternal farewell, dearest Aline.

"Unless all is over with me, it will never be delivered to you. I have not much to say, but coming from me when I can no longer give utterance to them you may value these professions of regard.

"I have loved you dearly, Aline, very dearly—with a strength of affection that I did not think I possessed. My sole regret is that we could not be united. This deprivation does not seem to have troubled you so much as it has troubled me. But I have felt it keenly, and never more keenly than at the present moment, when the thought of quitting you for ever forces itself upon me.

"I do not expect an impossibility, I do not ask you to be faithful to my memory. Act as your heart and feelings dictate. You will then act rightly.

"Never again, I am well assured, can you meet with love like mine—fervent, enduring, increasing.

"But you are sure to meet with another lover, who, if he should not have an idolatrous passion for you, like mine, may still be worthy of your regard.

"I would not have you quit the world, as you have sometimes declared you would

—if I were gone. I would have you live as other women live.

"Think of me sometimes, dearest Aline. Think of the happy days we have passed together. But do not weep for me, or if you must weep, let your tears be dried quickly, and smiles return to that bright countenance, on which I have loved to gaze.

"FAREWELL! FOR EVER!"

When Aline had finished reading the letter, she dropped it, and her emotion was so great that Georgette fearing she might faint, advanced to support her, and at the same time picked up the letter, which she offered to her mistress.

"Keep it for me!" cried Aline. "It must have a place next my heart."

"Will madame enter the next chamber?" asked Georgette. "No one is there, except——"

"I understand," replied Aline, shuddering. "Make sure he is alone, and I will go."

Georgette disappeared, and presently returned, saying that madame could indulge her sorrow unobserved.

On receiving this assurance, Aline went

into the adjoining chamber, the door of which had been left open.

Stretched on the couch, she beheld the lifeless body of him she had loved so dearly.

The fine features of the dead man bore no traces of pain, but had a perfectly calm expression. He might have been asleep.

It must have been a delusion, but as Aline bent over him, she fancied he smiled.

"Look! look! Georgette!" she cried. "He smiles upon me, as he used to do in life. Look at him!"

Georgette obeyed, but could discern nothing but the moveless features of the dead.

"I think he is about to speak to me," continued Aline, still gazing at him.

"Do not deceive yourself, madame," said her attendant. "You will never again hear the sound of his voice."

"I am not sure," replied the bewildered lady, with a look that alarmed Georgette. "Speak to me, dear Sir Thomas!—speak to me!"

She hung over his lips, as if in expectation of some response, but none came.

Georgette now became seriously alarmed, and regretted having brought her mistress into the chamber.

"Come with me, madame!" she cried. "You must not stay longer here."

But Aline refused to stir.

"You shall not bear me from my beloved," she cried. "I *will* remain here."

Georgette feared she might be obliged to use force, when the Comte de Clairvaux entered the chamber. Seeing at a glance how matters stood, he stepped up to the distracted lady, and said:

"Allow me to take you hence, madame."

Strange to say, Aline made no resistance now, but took the arm he offered her, and accompanied him to the adjoining chamber.

Georgette followed them.

Placing her on a couch with the greatest attention, the count whispered to Georgette as he quitted the room, "Her reason depends upon the care you take of her. Fortunately, M. Martin, the surgeon, is here. I will send him up to her at once."

"Be sure I will watch her most attentively, Monsieur le Comte," replied Georgette, sobbing. "She is as dear to me as my life."

Presently, M. Martin appeared, and after a brief examination of the unhappy lady,

directed Georgette to put her to bed without delay.

On quitting the room he found the Comte de Clairvaux on the staircase, who inquired most anxiously what he thought of the poor lady's state.

"I cannot give a precise opinion as yet," replied the surgeon. "But I very much fear she will lose her senses. That letter seems to have produced a terrible effect upon her."

"You alarm me greatly," cried the count. "If your fears are unhappily realised, I shall always blame myself for giving her the letter."

VIII.

BRERETON HALL.

Let us now repair to Brereton Hall, one of the many old timber-and-plaster mansions yet to be found in Cheshire and Lancashire.

This ancient house, with which many curious traditions were connected, and which had been successively inhabited by representatives of the Masseys, the Stanleys, and the Breretons, had been sadly neglected of late years, and though not positively in a ruinous state was the next thing to it.

More than half the rooms were stripped of their furniture and shut up, while those occupied by the present inmates had been partially dismantled.

Still, the great banqueting-hall was hung with tapestry—somewhat faded, it is true. Still, the latticed bay windows glowed with

painted glass. Still, the magnificent oak staircase, of Elizabeth's time, mounted from the entrance-hall to the upper chambers. Still, some exquisitely carved oak furniture was left—together with a few old portraits of the Breretons; but the large library had been completely robbed of its treasures.

A general air of neglect pervaded the fine old place, and seemed to intimate very plainly that its occupants were too poor to keep it up.

The garden surrounding the ancient mansion seemed equally neglected.

Formerly it had boasted beautiful clipped alleys and trim walks, with a smooth and delightful bowling-green, but now the latter was seldom mown, and the alleys were no longer trim.

It seemed a pity that the old hall was not sold—and sold it would have been, but there happened to be a defect in the title.

Two days after the tragic event just recorded took place at Dieppe, a very fine-looking young man and a middle-aged dame were seated at breakfast in the deep recess formed by one of the bay windows we have alluded to.

The lady's features, which bore a strong

family likeness to those of the ill-fated Sir Thomas Starkey, had a melancholy expression, and her sombre attire proclaimed her a widow.

She was, in fact, Mrs. Brereton, and the young man with her was her son Stanley. He was habited in a dark grey tweed suit, which suited him exceedingly well.

Stanley Brereton, whose fortunes did not look very promising at home, had recently resolved to go out to Australia, in spite of the remonstrances of his mother, who could not bear to part with him; and they had been talking over the matter, as they usually did, at breakfast.

But on this occasion the young man declared that he had quite made up his mind—that no entreaties should move him—and that next day he meant to go up to London and take a passage to Melbourne in one of the royal mail steamships.

"Then you are quite determined to leave me, dearest boy?" said his mother, regarding him with tearful eyes.

"What good should I do by staying here?" he rejoined. "You ought to be glad to get rid of me."

"Oh! don't say that!" she exclaimed. "You are the sole comfort of my life."

"Then come with me to Melbourne!" he cried. "You can go by the Orient Line—splended steamships! Ha!"

"No! no! I should like to go with you, but I daren't take such a long voyage. Besides, what should I do when I got to Melbourne?"

"Oh, we'll find plenty to do I can promise you. If not we'll go to the Bush."

"Well, defer your design for a month, and meantime I'll make a strong effort with your uncle, Sir Thomas."

"It won't answer, depend up it. He'll do nothing for us. By-the-by, I had a strange dream about him last night. Shall I tell it you?"

"I don't care for dreams in a general way. But perhaps this may interest me!"

"At all events it's curious. I thought I saw my uncle lying on the ground in a dying state."

"Dying! Oh, dear me!"

"Yes; he had been shot in a duel, as it seemed to me, for several persons were standing near him, and amongst them was

a lady, who, I fancied, was the belle Aline, of whom we have heard so much."

"That horrid creature seems always associated with Sir Thomas. Is your dream ended?"

"No. I thought Sir Thomas died of his wound."

"Good gracious! I hope not," exclaimed Mrs. Brereton. "I don't like your dream at all, Stanley."

"But surely you have no belief in it?"

"Not exactly belief—but it makes me feel extremely uneasy."

"Then I'm sorry I related it to you. But here comes old Minshull with some letters. They'll help to change the topic."

As he spoke an old and very respectable man-servant, habited in black, marched slowly towards them, and laid down a couple of letters on the table.

"What's this?" exclaimed Stanley in amazement, taking up one of the letters, the cover of which was edged with black, and addressed to himself. "My uncle's handwriting!"

"My letter is likewise from him," said Mrs. Brereton. "I declare I'm afraid to open it."

"Why afraid?" cried Stanley. "He couldn't announce his own death?"

"I believe Sir Thomas is dead," observed Minshull, who had lingered near the table, having evidently something to communicate. "Both you, sir, and my mistress will be shocked when I tell you I've just read in the *Daily Telegraph*, which I have in my pocket, that Sir Thomas was shot in a duel at Dieppe, on Tuesday last."

"Are you sure, Minshull?" exclaimed Stanley, quite thunderstruck.

"You can read it yourself, sir," replied the old man-servant, producing the paper.

"Yes, here it is!" cried Stanley. "FATAL DUEL AT DIEPPE. — On the day before yesterday, Sir Thomas Starkey, who has latterly been residing at Dieppe, was shot in a duel by Captain Darcy, of the Grenadier Guards, cousin to Lady Starkey. The unfortunate baronet died immediately. We have not yet learnt the cause of the quarrel."

"Alas, my poor brother!" exclaimed Mrs. Brereton. "What a sad fate! This puts an end to all my hopes. But let me see what his letter says," she added, tearing it open. "This appears to have been

written on the very morning when the duel took place. And what do you think?" she added, suddenly changing her tone. "He has left me a thousand a year."

"A thousand a year!" exclaimed Stanley. "That's very handsome. I'm rejoiced to hear it. I wonder whether he has done anything for me," he added, opening his own letter. "Hurrah!" he cried in an ecstasy of delight. "He has left me all the rest of his property. That must be two thousand a year at least. Something like an uncle, eh?

"This is what he says: 'I have left a thousand a year to your mother, and I leave the remainder of my property to you.'"

"Astonishing!" exclaimed Mrs. Brereton.

Transported with delight, Stanley sprang from his chair, and danced about the room.

"No Australia now!" he exclaimed. "I'll stop at home! I'll repair and refurnish this dear old house! I'll—I don't know what I won't do!"

Old Minshull, who had not quitted the room, looked almost as much delighted as his young master.

"I sincerely congratulate you, sir," he said, in accents of heartfelt satisfaction; "and you, too, madam."

"As the bearer of these good tidings, Minshull, you ought to be rewarded," said Stanley. "When I receive my fortune, you shall have a hundred pounds."

"And another hundred from me," added Mrs. Brereton.

The old servant thanked them both warmly, and quitted the room.

"Oh! I am so happy!" cried Mrs. Brereton—"so very happy! and yet I ought not to say so," she added, checking herself, "for is not our good fortune purchased by poor Sir Thomas's death?"

"Quite true, my dear mother, quite true! And yet it's impossible to help rejoicing at such an unexpected piece of good luck. I'm afraid I've done my uncle great injustice. I thought rather badly of him—but he has turned out a trump. He must always have had a very kind feeling towards us, or he would never have acted thus."

"Sir Thomas had his faults, no doubt!—but he had a very warm heart—of that I am certain," said Mrs. Brereton.

"He has proved it now," said Stanley.

"But he does not seem to have left anything to Lady Starkey?"

"She has a good fortune of her own," remarked Mrs. Brereton. "But I am glad the other lady is not included in his will."

"Do you know who were Sir Thomas's solicitors, mother?" asked Stanley.

"Yes—Dawson and Davis, Hare Court, Inner Temple," she replied.

"No doubt we shall soon hear from them respecting the will," said Stanley.

Just then old Minshull again made his appearance.

"This time I bring you a telegraphic message," he said, delivering the message to Stanley. "Shall the messenger wait?"

Receiving an answer in the affirmative the old servant withdrew.

"'Tis from Dawson and Davis, as I suspected," said Stanley. "They have sent to inform me that they hold Sir Thomas's will, which has been recently made, and will forward it immediately on receiving instructions to that effect. All's right, you see, mother. But I won't trouble them to send the will. I'll run up to town tomorrow, and consult them."

"That will be the best plan," said his

mother. "The will ought to be left with them."

"No doubt," replied Stanley. "I'll send them a telegram to that effect."

And he hurried out of the room.

"What a sudden turn of fortune!" mentally ejaculated Mrs. Brereton, when she was left alone. "Heaven grant my dear boy may be able to act aright under such trying circumstances. But I need have no anxiety on his account."

IX.

MILDRED WARBURTON.

When Stanley Brereton rose on that eventful morning, nothing seemed left him but to seek a fortune in a new world.

He did not like leaving his mother, to whom he was devotedly attached—for an indefinite period—perhaps for ever! He did not like leaving another person—but he had made up his mind to go. He had been unsuccessful in his attempt to obtain a living, and seemed destined to remain all his life a poor gentleman.

But there was no reason why this should be. He had plenty of energy—plenty of ability—and was remarkably good-looking, with very prepossessing manners.

But he was excessively sensitive, and resented the slightest offence—when per-

haps none was intended. If treated coolly by an acquaintance, he would never speak to that very person again.

For a poor man, without expectations, this was a foolish course to pursue, and he felt its effects in the loss of several of his best friends.

Thinking his uncle had turned his back upon him, and neglected his mother, he wrote him a very indignant letter, which caused Sir Thomas to discontinue an allowance hitherto made to his sister.

At last, the impracticable young man resolved to leave England, and seek a fortune elsewhere; and after some deliberation he decided on going to Australia.

People there, he thought, have fewer prejudices than they have in the old country. Besides, no one would know him—and what matter if they did? He had only just enough to pay his passage out, and start him. But what did that signify? He should soon make a fortune. At least he fancied so.

We may easily imagine what the effect of such an announcement as he had just received must have been upon a young man so constituted.

From poverty, as he deemed it, to wealth! the change was almost too sudden. He had no expectation whatever of becoming his uncle's heir—nor would he have attempted to seek a reconciliation with him. In another week or so he would probably have set out for Australia.

Just in time to stop him, he learnt that he had suddenly become possessed of a large income. A man must have his feelings pretty well under control not to become excited by such intelligence, and Stanley, who was by no means of a calm temperament, could scarcely contain himself.

After despatching an answer to the solicitors, he went out into the garden where he could commune with himself.

"At length, I have become a person of some importance," he thought, "and can command as much attention as Sir Thomas, whose position I used to think so enviable. Many plans for the future occur to me, but I shall decide on none till I have well reflected. Whatever else I may do, I won't quit this dear old place. I will restore it, and so realise a dream I have often indulged. Perhaps Mildred may like it as much as I do. We shall see. I wonder

whether she has heard of my uncle's death. If so, her curiosity must be aroused. Shall I walk over to Beaucliffe, and tell her and the squire the good news? How surprised both will be!"

He had been meditating thus for more than half an hour, when old Minshull came into the garden to inform him that Squire Warburton and his daughter had just driven over from Beaucliffe House.

"The very persons I wished to see," said Stanley. "Where are they?"

"With your mother, sir," replied Minshull. "I don't know whether I did right, but I ventured to tell them the good news, and wonderfully surprised by it they both were. The squire could scarcely believe what I told him, and put several questions to me. Miss Mildred clapped her hands with delight. Oh, sir! she's a charming young lady."

"That she is, Minshull," said the young man, smiling.

Stanley then hastened towards the house, but had not reached the entrance when a very lovely girl came forth, and sprang forward to meet him.

"I was just coming to look for you," she

cried, "and offer you my congratulations. Accept them now."

"They are most welcome," he replied. "How kind of you and the squire to come. I wished of all things to see you. And don't suppose I should have allowed the day to pass without finding my way to Beaucliffe. But this is much better, as it proves that you take some little interest in me."

"But we didn't know you were heir to Brereton," cried Mildred. "We only knew Sir Thomas had been killed in a duel. However, old Minshull quickly enlightened us."

"A good genius must have prompted you, for you have come at the right moment," said Stanley. "Shall we take a turn in the garden?"

She acceded at once to the proposition, and tripped along by his side.

A prettier girl than Mildred Warburton could not be found in the whole county of Chester. Just nineteen, tall, with a slight, graceful figure, dark eyes, dark tresses, lovely features, and a complexion like a blush rose.

A first-rate equestrienne, she constantly went out with the hounds during the hunt-

ing season, and was generally in at the death.

Squire Warburton, as her father was constantly styled, was excessively fond of her, and indulged all her whims and fancies. He had lost his wife some years before, and Mildred more than supplied her place, for Mrs. Warburton had been a great invalid.

When Mildred did not ride out with the squire she drove him in her pretty pony phaeton, and acompanied him almost everywhere.

Mildred was quite mistress of Beaucliffe —sat at the head of the table, helped to receive the guests, and managed all the servants. She was fortunate in possessing an excellent housekeeper and a very good butler. Nor must we omit to mention that she had a good deal to do with the stables.

Such was the fair Mildred, and being an only daughter, with good expectations and very pretty, we need scarcely say she had a host of admirers. But she favoured none of them.

On the present occasion—as the day was warm and sunny—she wore a light Nanki

dress, and a straw hat with a white feather round it.

"Well, you really are an uncommonly lucky fellow, I must say, Stanley," she remarked, as they entered the garden.

"No doubt about it," he rejoined; "and I hope my good luck may not desert me now. By-the-by, how do you like this old place?"

"Pretty well. If it was put in order I dare say I should like it better."

"I mean to restore the house completely, and make it as fine a place as Beaucliffe."

"Outshine us, eh?"

"No, not outshine you—equal you. When all is done, and Brereton is itself again, will you become its mistress?"

"You put the question so abruptly that I can't give an answer. I must have time for consideration. Perhaps I may accept the offer—but don't be too sure. I am very changeable, and may alter my mind in an hour."

"Then pray decide at once," he replied, taking her hand and pressing it to his lips. "Say you will be mine."

But she shook her head.

"I like you well enough," she said; "but I don't want to quit papa."

"I persuaded myself you really loved me, Mildred, and would make a sacrifice for my sake," he said, with a deeply disappointed look. "But I find you care no more for me than for others."

"I must ask papa's consent. I must be guided by him."

"What do you think he will say?" asked Stanley.

"I can't tell," she replied. "Yesterday I am sure he would have refused. But now you have become your uncle's heir, he may regard you in a different light."

"Yesterday I shouldn't have ventured to propose—understand that, Mildred."

"Your prospects are wonderfully improved, it must be owned. They are all that papa could desire."

"Then I'll speak to him at once!" cried Stanley.

"Pray don't speak to him to-day, or you'll spoil all. Let me prepare him first."

"Very well, since you wish it," replied Stanley, rather surprised. "May I give him a hint?"

"Not the slightest," she rejoined. "I forbid you on pain of my displeasure. But let us go and join them. We've been here too long already."

"To me it seems only a moment," replied Stanley, as they quitted the garden.

X.

SQUIRE WARBURTON OF BEAUCLIFFE.

SQUIRE WARBURTON was the picture of a jovial country gentleman. He looked wonderfully hale and hearty, and though not far from seventy, boasted he had never known a day's illness in his life.

Yet he was not one of your prudent folk, who live by rule, and deprive themselves of the enjoyments of life, in order to prolong it.

On the contrary, he liked a good dinner, and a glass of old port after it; and as he had an excellent French cook and a well-stocked cellar he was able to indulge his tastes.

In person the squire was tall and robust, with good features, and a rich, rosy complexion. His dark brown hair had become

snow-white, and contrasted strongly, though not disagreeably, with his pink cheeks.

His costume—about which he was very particular—consisted of a blue coat with brass buttons, a buff waistcoat, a low-crowned, broad-brimmed hat, long gaiters, and not unfrequently boots with brown tops.

Squire Warburton, as we have said, was exceedingly fond of his daughter, and showed no inclination to part with her.

It was understood that she had received several advantageous offers, but none had been accepted.

Whether the suitors were refused by the squire or his daughter, did not appear.

Stanley had always been a favourite of the squire, who was exceedingly kind to him, and gave him a general invitation to Beaucliffe. Seeing so much of Mildred, the young man naturally fell in love with her, but he managed to conceal his passion, and the old gentleman never suspected it.

When the youthful pair returned from the garden, they found the squire in the entrance hall with Mrs. Brereton.

Calling to Stanley, in his cheery tones, Mr. Warburton stepped forward, and shook him by the hand with more than his usual cordiality.

"I congratulate you most heartily, my boy," he exclaimed, "on your good fortune. You deserve it. But I confess I never thought you would obtain it. It has come just in the nick of time. In another week we should have lost you. How obliging in Sir Thomas to get out of the way at this juncture. You will now be able to take a place with the best of us—always supposing you fancy a country gentleman's life."

"I have had no experience of any other, sir," replied Stanley; "but it suits me perfectly."

"Stanley tells me he means to restore this old house, papa," observed Mildred.

"Bravo!" exclaimed the squire. "It *has* been a fine place, and no doubt will be a fine place again."

"It shall be, I promise you, sir," said Stanley.

"Give good dinners, keep plenty of company, and you'll soon become popular,

said the squire. "But to make the home complete, you'll want a wife."

"That will do later on," said Mrs. Brereton.

"Ten years hence, I should say," added Mildred.

"I'll bet a hundred to twenty he doesn't wait half that time," laughed the squire.

"I must finish my house before I think of marrying," said Stanley.

"A very prudent resolve, my boy," observed the squire. "Stick to it. And now when will you come and dine with us?"

"As soon as I return," replied Stanley. "I'm going up to town to-morrow morning."

"Then come to-day! And I hope you'll come with him, ma'am. The carriage shall fetch you and take you back."

"You are very kind, sir," replied Mrs. Brereton. "But I don't think we ought to dine out to-day."

"Poh!—we have nobody staying with us," said the squire. "We shall be quite alone."

"Pray *do* come, dear Mrs. Brereton," urged Mildred. "We shall be very glad to see you."

Stanley looked entreatingly at his mother.

"Well, since you are alone, that alters the case," replied Mrs. Brereton. "We'll come."

"Glad to hear it," cried the squire. "Expect the carriage at six."

The visitors then took leave, and Stanley conducted the young lady to the pony-phaeton, and pressed her hand gently as he placed her in her seat.

The little carriage was the prettiest thing imaginable, as we have said—the ponies were perfect, and Mildred never looked better than when she sat behind them with a whip in her hand.

As soon as the squire had got in, and the groom had jumped up, she just touched the lively animals, and off they started.

"Well, my darling," said the squire, as they went on their way; "what think you now of our young friend? Do you like him any better, eh?"

"How do *you* like him, papa?" she rejoined, avoiding the question.

"I've always liked him," he replied. "But I never regarded him as a possible son-in-law."

"Do you regard him so now?" she asked.

"I'll tell you a week hence," he replied, somewhat doubtfully.

"But you seem to encourage him."

"I wanted to see what his intentions are," he replied.

Mildred did not like to say more on the subject just then.

Beaucliffe was about five miles from the place they had just quitted, and the drive thither was through a very pretty country —in fact, the last two miles were the park, which was extremely varied and beautiful, and boasted some extremely fine old timber, Mr. Warburton having used the axe very judiciously.

Next to the trees, the chief ornament of the place was the Mere, a large sheet of water in front of the mansion, with a drive partly round it.

The park was well stocked with deer, and you could scarcely look in any direction without catching a glimpse of a herd, either crouching beneath some great tree or tripping off to a covert.

Dating from Elizabeth's time, Beaucliffe was a much more imposing structure than

Brereton, and excellently preserved. The frontage was very fine, having wings ornamented by gables and large mullioned windows, with two tall octagonal towers in the centre, beneath which was an arched gateway leading to a large quadrangular court.

From its position in front of the Mere, and the woods around it, Beaucliffe House was seen to great advantage as you approached it from the long avenue.

Just as the squire and his fair daughter turned into a drive leading to the gateway, they perceived a couple of stylish-looking young men on horseback, each with a groom behind him, coming from the house, where they had evidently been calling.

"Who the deuce are those two gay bucks, Mildred?" said the squire.

"Piers Massey and Reginald Brooke," she replied. "I'm surprised you don't know them, papa."

"I didn't know them at first, but I now recollect asking them to dine with us one day this week. Could it have been to-day?"

"Most likely. If so, you'll be in a pretty fix with Mrs. Brereton."

"You must send her back word."

"No—no—we can't do that! But here the young fellows come."

And she stopped in order to speak to them.

Both were good-looking, well-dressed, and well-mannered, and not at all foppish.

Hats raised, as they approached the phaeton on either side, their first salutations being made to Mildred, and then each had a hearty shake of the hand from her father.

"Well, here we are, you perceive, squire," cried Piers Massey.

"No reminder needed," added Reginald Brooke.

"Glad to see you both," said the squire in his heartiest manner, "but to tell you the truth, I wasn't quite sure of the day."

"I hope we've made no mistake, Miss Warburton?" said Reginald Brooke.

"It makes no sort of difference to us," she replied. "To-day is just as convenient as to-morrow."

"Yes, we know your papa's character for hospitality," said Piers Massey. "But he might have some other engagement."

"None that will interfere with you," rejoined the squire. "You'll stay till to-morrow?"

"With the greatest pleasure," replied Massey. "Since you assure us we're not in the way."

"We've just returned from Brereton," said Mildred. "Perhaps, you've not heard of Stanley's good luck?"

"No! what is it?" cried the two young fellows, surprised.

"His uncle, Sir Thomas Starkey, I see, has just got shot in a duel at Dieppe," observed Brooke.

"But before getting shot, Sir Thomas took care to leave Stanley all his property," said the squire. "So he's now very well off."

"That's the way to do it," cried Massey. "I wish I had a rich uncle who wanted to make me his heir."

"You would let him fight a duel, I suppose?" observed Mildred.

"Half a dozen, if he wished," replied the young man. "He would probably get killed in one of them."

And they all laughed, except the squire.

"No jesting on this subject," cried the old gentleman. "We expect Stanley and his mother at dinner to-day."

"Then we won't make the slightest allusion to the duel," said both young men, still laughing.

The party then went on to the house, where a portly butler and a couple of footmen in livery appeared at the entrance. Mildred sprang from her seat and vanished, leaving the squire to attend to the young men.

In another minute the saddle-bags, with which the grooms were charged, were delivered to the footmen, and the squire conducted his unexpected guests to a large and magnificently furnished drawing-room, looking upon the park and the Mere.

"Ah, here it is," exclaimed Reginald Brooke, rapturously, advancing as he spoke towards the window, the lower part of which was standing open. "Here's the matchless view! No one in Cheshire has such a look-out as you, squire."

"You flatter me," replied the old gentleman, in a deprecatory tone, but by no means displeased by the compliment.

"I'm exactly of Brooke's opinion," said

Massey, advancing. "You should have the scene painted."

"It has been painted, and by a first-rate artist," replied the squire. "The picture was greatly admired at the last Exhibition; but I've not yet got it home."

While they were gazing at the lovely prospect, finding out new beauties every minute, Mildred entered the room.

She had changed her dress, and looked more charming than ever in her new costume.

XI.

SIR RANDAL DE BLUNDEVILLE.

As she moved towards a splendid piano, which stood at one side of the room, she observed to the young men who instantly joined her, "Are either of you musical?"

Both shook their heads.

"Your education has been shamefully neglected," she cried, opening the instrument, and running her fingers rapidly over the keys.

"But we are both amateurs," said Massey; "and are quite able to appreciate Miss Warburton's brilliant performance."

"I accept the compliment, though it is wholly undeserved," she replied, sitting down, and commencing a gavotte by Bach, which enchanted them.

She then played a sonatina by Beethoven

—played it charmingly—a gigue by Bach, and was engaged on a valse by Chopin, when an interruption was offered by the portly butler who appeared at the door, and announced Lady Talmash.

Mildred immediately quitted the piano and hastened to meet her.

Lady Talmash was not alone, but had with her a couple of very pretty and very well-dressed girls, whom she introduced as Miss Carleton and Miss Selina Carleton.

Mildred had often heard of them, and was enchanted to see them, and so was the squire, with whom Lady Talmash was a special favourite.

Her ladyship was the widow of Sir Hugh Talmash—very handsome, very captivating, and not more than thirty. As she always seemed to like the squire's society, and laughed at his jests, no wonder he admired her.

"We are come to have a little lawn tennis with you, my dear," said Lady Talmash to Mildred. "I told my young friends they would be sure of some out-door amusement, on a fine day, at Beaucliffe."

"And they shall not be disappointed," replied Mildred. "There are two capital

players, who I am sure will be happy to assist."

Both the young men were known to Lady Talmash, and having shaken hands with her, were presented to her friends.

After a little chat the whole party walked out through the open window upon the lawn, and, as might be expected, the Miss Carletons were delighted with everything they beheld.

They were really two very fine girls—especially Selina—and the young men began to pay them attention.

Assisted by a footman, who had been summoned for the purpose, the squire and his daughter were making arrangements for a game at lawn tennis, when two more visitors were announced.

These were Sir Randal de Blundeville, a person of considerable importance, and Mr. Marston Malpas, another of Mildred's numerous admirers.

How they all contrived to find their way to Beaucliffe on this particular day—when he expected none of them—the hospitable squire could not imagine. But it put him out very much for a few minutes, and he

had hardly recovered his usual good humour when he went to welcome the proud baronet.

A very stately personage was Sir Randal de Blundeville—so stiff and formal, that even his most intimate friends stood in awe of him. Sir Randal was of middle age, and had a very commanding presence, his large features being marked by a haughty expression.

His young friend, Marston Malpas, was very deferential to him, and consequently a great favourite.

The squire received his important visitor with some ceremony, and expressed great pleasure in seeing him, secretly wondering whether there was any particular motive for the call.

Walking towards the party on the lawn, Sir Randal bowed to Mildred, shook hands with Lady Talmash, and made himself rather more agreeable than usual. For a short time, young Malpas remained near him, but he soon afterwards joined the players.

Since it was now quite clear that everybody would stay to luncheon, the squire hurried off to give some directions to his

housekeeper, Mrs. Twemlow; but he found she had made all needful arrangements.

"You might have left the matter to me, sir," she said, somewhat reproachfully.

"I know I might, Mrs. Twemlow," he replied, "but I thought it best to inform you now that Sir Randal de Blundeville is here."

"I was quite aware of it," replied Mrs. Twemlow.

He next spoke to his butler, Glossop, and bade him take care to have plenty of champagne and hock.

The butler promised attention, and satisfied that all would go on well, the squire returned to his visitors, and found everybody engaged at lawn tennis, except Sir Randal.

The latter was seated on a bench by himself at a little distance from the players, and the squire immediately joined him.

"I'm glad you're come back, Mr. Warburton," said Sir Randal. "I have a proposal to make to you, and this is a good opportunity of making it."

"Quite ready to listen to anything you have to say, Sir Randal," rejoined the

squire, wondering what the deuce was coming.

"I need not tell you, Mr. Warburton," premised Sir Randal, "that your daughter is universally admired. Her charms and accomplishments are talked about throughout the county. She seems to turn the heads and captivate the hearts of all she meets. You won't be surprised, therefore, to learn that she has made a new conquest."

"Surely he is not going to propose for her himself!" thought the squire. "I must act rather cautiously."

He then said aloud, "That depends upon circumstances, Sir Randal. I might be very much surprised."

"But if I tell you that I have an offer to make——"

"On your own part, Sir Randal?" interrupted the squire. "However much I might feel honoured, I fear my daughter——"

"You mistake my meaning altogether, sir," said Sir Randal. "I am not such a fool as to offer myself to a lovely girl like Miss Warburton. But I promised to say a word for my young friend, Marston Malpas, who seems to have some difficulty in plead-

ing his own cause. In my opinion he is not ineligible, being well connected, well off, and able to make a good settlement if required."

"I don't doubt it, Sir Randal, but I'm afraid he has no chance," said the squire; "and therefore I won't encourage him. To tell you the truth, my daughter is quite perplexed—she has so many suitors."

"Then there is an end of the matter," replied Sir Randal. "Marston must look elsewhere for a wife."

"Pray tell him that I should have liked him very much for a son-in-law," said the squire. "But I have really no voice in the matter."

"I will tell him what you say, sir," replied Sir Randal, with an incredulous smile.

Young Malpas had watched the interview between his representative and the squire, and quite understood what they were talking about.

The significant look given him by Sir Randal told him that his hopes were crushed.

"Well, I shan't die of disappointment," he thought.

XII.

LUNCHEON.

About half an hour later luncheon was announced.

A joyous response was made on all sides to the summons, and those engaged at lawn tennis immediately ceased playing.

Offering his arm to Lady Talmash, the squire begged Sir Randal to take charge of Mildred; and, leaving the young men to choose whom they liked, he led the way to the house.

The dining-room windows, like those of the drawing-room, looked upon the lawn, and being left open the guests could enter as they pleased.

The portly butler and the footmen were there to attend upon them, and find them places at the large round table in the centre

of the room, laden with cold viands and glittering with silver and glass.

In a very few minutes all were seated—and very agreeably to themselves, as it seemed—when it was noticed there was a vacant chair on the right of Lady Talmash.

At the very moment, when the superfluous chair was about to be removed, some one appeared at the window, and proved to be Stanley Brereton.

Though very much surprised to see him, the squire instantly sent the butler to beg him to come in. Stanley at once complied, and bowed to the company, while the squire, pointing to the vacant chair, said merrily:

"A seat, you perceive, has been kept for you, my boy. But you are rather earlier than I expected."

"A word will explain," replied the young man. "After your departure, my mother decided on remaining at home to-day, so I agreed to walk over and let you know. And here I am."

"And very glad I am to see you," replied the squire.

A good deal of laughter followed Stanley's brief explanation; but all the party,

though surprised, seemed pleased to see him—especially Lady Talmash.

"I've just been told that he has succeeded to his uncle, Sir Thomas Starkey's property," observed Sir Randal to Mildred. "Can it be true?"

'Quite true," she replied.

Then everybody began to talk about the young man's good fortune, and many of the remarks—though made in a low tone—could not fail to reach his ears. Luckily, they were very complimentary.

Meanwhile wings of cold chicken, with slices of tongue and ham, together with portions of pigeon pie and other matters, were handed round, while the glasses foamed with champagne; and in a very few minutes the conversation became much more lively.

The squire was delighted, for nothing pleased him more than a merry party.

"I am so glad your ladyship came over to us to-day," he said. "Those Miss Carletons seem very nice girls."

"Uncommonly nice girls," she replied. "I must introduce you to them presently," she added to Stanley. "By-the-by, have

you fixed any plans? Do you mean to stay in this part of the country?"

"I'll answer for him," interposed the squire. "He means to restore Brereton, and make a much finer house of it than this."

"That would scarcely be possible, I think," smiled Lady Talmash.

"Wholly impossible," said Stanley. "The squire is only jesting. But I mean to do something for the old place."

"I used to admire it, but I have not seen it lately," observed her ladyship.

"No one has," replied Stanley; "and I was about to abandon it altogether, when my uncle, making me his heir, has preserved Brereton to the family."

"Very satisfactory," said Lady Talmash. "When you have finished your improvements you must ask us all to come and see your place."

"The improvements will take a long time," remarked the squire. "He must ask us soon."

"Never mind the house being out of repair," said Lady Talmash. "We are sure to be pleased with it. Besides," she

added significantly, "you may find other arrangements necessary."

"Precisely what I told him," observed the squire.

"I will follow your ladyship's advice," replied Stanley; "and I hope you will allow me to consult you?"

"Don't hesitate at any time," she rejoined, in the most affable manner.

While this conversation was going on, more champagne had been handed around, and sweets and *patisserie* had succeeded the solids.

After all, champagne is the only wine at luncheon. Hock is very well in its way, and has its charms for men, but it does not raise the spirits so quickly as champagne, and is therefore not so much liked by ladies.

We do not know how often Glossop went round the table, but whenever he made the circuit, he allowed no glass to remain empty.

Thus the party became remarkably cheerful, and a great deal of laughter was heard as they issued forth upon the lawn.

They did not immediately resume their

pastime, but collected in two or three groups.

Lady Talmash did not forget her promise, and introduced Stanley to the Miss Carletons, with whom he seemed much pleased, but they were still engaged to Massey and Reginald Brooke.

Before he could address himself to Mildred, the squire came up, and took him to Sir Randal, who had begged to be made known to him.

"I have only just learned that you have succeeded to your uncle's property, sir," said the baronet. "I knew Sir Thomas Starkey well, and liked him. When he was young—about your age—there never was a finer-looking man, nor a more perfect gentleman."

"I am much pleased, Sir Randal, to hear you speak in such terms of my uncle," said Stanley. "Though his nearest relative, I really knew very little of him, but I always thought him very handsome."

"So he was," replied Sir Randal. "I am very much concerned at the manner of his death, but I will say no more about that. Miss Warburton tells me you are likely to remain amongst us."

"It is my intention to restore Brereton and occupy the place, Sir Randal," said Stanley. "You will be surprised to see me here to-day. But I expected to find Mr. Warburton and his daughter quite alone. Imagine my surprise at meeting a large party."

"Oh, I understand all about it," rejoined Sir Randal. "It is quite an accident that I am here myself. But I am very glad I came, since I have met you. When you get settled I hope you will come and see me."

"Delighted. But I am going up to town to-morrow on business, and don't exactly know when I shall get back."

"Adieu, then, for the present," said Sir Randal.

And after a brief converse with the squire, he quitted the party.

"You have gained a friend in Sir Randal," said the squire, coming up to Stanley, and clapping him on the shoulder. "He seemed vastly pleased with you."

"I am equally pleased with him," replied the other. "He is not at all the consequential personage he has been represented."

"He can be affable to those he likes,"

laughed the squire; "but intolerably rude to such as annoy him. But won't you play lawn tennis?"

"No, thank you," replied Stanley. "I mean to run away as soon as I have said a word to your daughter."

"I'm afraid you are put out by the party," remarked the squire; "but we really couldn't help it. They all came unexpectedly."

At this moment Mildred ran up to them.

"You are not going, Stanley?" she cried.

"Yes, he is," said the squire.

"I forbid you," she cried; "and shall be highly offended if you disobey my mandate."

"I shall be sorry to incur your displeasure," he replied. "But you really must excuse me."

"No, I won't," she rejoined. "Disobey at your peril!"

"How will you punish me?" he cried, forcing a laugh.

"You will see," she replied. "But I advise you not to try me."

"Come! come! this is all nonsense!" cried the squire. "Don't compel him to stay against his inclination."

At this juncture, Reginald Brooke called out to Mildred that she was wanted.

"I'm coming," she replied. "Take heed," she added in a low tone to Stanley. "You'll repent it if you go."

And she hurried away.

Stanley looked rather perplexed, but the squire treated the matter as a jest.

"Don't stay if you don't like it," he said.

"Farewell, then," rejoined Stanley, shaking his hand. "Don't come with me!"

And he slowly quitted the lawn, without once looking back.

Mildred could scarcely believe her eyes when she saw him depart. She fully expected him to obey her injunctions, and was very much provoked by his disregard of them.

"I will never see him again!—never!" she mentally ejaculated.

"Is Mr. Stanley Brereton gone?" inquired Lady Talmash.

"I suppose so," replied Mildred, as if it was a matter of perfect indifference to her.

"Oh! I'm so sorry," cried her ladyship. "I wanted to talk to him about several

things. He didn't give me a hint that he was leaving immediately."

"It was a sudden resolve, I fancy," said Mildred.

"Not a sudden quarrel, I hope," thought Lady Talmash. "It looks very much like it."

Stanley's departure was not without its effect on Mildred.

She seemed suddenly to have lost her spirits, and Lady Talmash became convinced that her conjecture as to a quarrel was correct.

"Precisely the occasion when a misunderstanding ought to have been avoided," thought her ladyship.

XIII.

STANLEY CALLS ON HIS SOLICITORS.

HAVING made such preparations overnight as he deemed necessary for the journey, and taken leave of his mother, Stanley started next morning by an early train for London.

His parting with Mildred had not been very satisfactory, and he blamed himself for the haste with which he had quitted Beaucliffe; but he trusted all would be forgotten before his return.

"I never knew her so peremptory," he thought; "and certainly she never before threatened me with her displeasure. However, she could not have meant it seriously, and a reconciliation will be easily effected. I won't make myself uneasy."

But in spite of this resolution the quar-

rel haunted him during the whole of the journey.

On arriving in town he left his luggage at the station, and taking a hansom cab to the Temple, proceeded to the offices of Messrs. Dawson and Davies, in Hare-court.

On giving his name to a clerk he was shown into a room evidently devoted to legal business, where he found Mr. Dawson —a thin, middle-aged man, with grey hair and sharp features.

On hearing his name, the solicitor immediately arose, and shaking hands with him cordially, said:

"Pray sit down, and let us talk matters over."

Stanley took the chair offered him.

"Let me ask you in the first place, Mr. Dawson," he said, "where my uncle is to be buried?"

"Sir Thomas is already buried in the cemetery at Dieppe," replied Mr. Dawson. "On receiving intelligence of his death, Mr. Davies, my partner, immediately started for Dieppe, and on arriving there found that the Comte de Clairvaux—Sir Thomas's most intimate friend, and his second in the unfortunate affair—had

already made arrangements for his friend's interment in the place I have mentioned. The comte, it appeared, had been influenced by a lady to whom Sir Thomas was greatly attached, and who affirmed that it was the deceased baronet's own wish that if his death occurred while he was in Dieppe, he should be buried in the Prostestant burial ground, and he had even chosen a spot for his grave. Not doubting for a moment the truth of what was told him, Mr. Davies allowed the funeral to take place. The ceremony was performed in the quietest manner possible, and when all was over, it was understood that the poor lady who assisted at it meant to hide herself for ever in a religious retreat."

"Your narration interests me deeply, sir," replied Stanley much moved. "This unhappy lady seems to have been very much attached to my unfortunate uncle."

"She was devotedly attached to him, sir, as I myself have heard from Sir Thomas's own lips," replied Mr. Dawson. "Luckily for you she is very well off, or your uncle would have left her a great part of his property. He told me so himself."

"I may esteem myself singularly for-

tunate in all respects," said Stanley. "At one time I had no reason to expect that Sir Thomas would remember me in any way."

"He only made his will when he was last in London—a short time ago," replied Mr. Dawson. "But I ought to tell you that he had then expressed himself in very kindly terms concerning your mother and yourself. If he has hitherto neglected you both, he has now made ample amends. At this moment, I cannot exactly say what you will inherit from him, but I believe it will not be far from three thousand a year."

Stanley could hardly repress his satisfaction.

"As you are aware," pursued Mr. Dawson, "he had large landed property in Cheshire, from which the bulk of his income was derived. All this is now yours. Mr. Davies and myself are appointed his executors, and we will see that all his directions are duly fulfilled."

"I could not be in better hands, sir," remarked Stanley. "Is it necessary, think you, that I should go over to Dieppe?"

"By no means," rejoined Mr. Dawson.

"My partner will do all that is required. I expect he will return either to-morrow or next day, and then you will know exactly what has occurred. But I am certain nothing will be left undone. No doubt you will remain in town some little time?"

"I must needs do so," replied Stanley. "This matter has come upon me so suddenly that I have not yet had time to provide myself with mourning. I mean to put up at the York Hotel, Albemarle-street."

"Very good," said Mr. Dawson, making a note of the address. "Poor Lady Starkey called upon us yesterday to make inquiries respecting her late husband, and expressed a great desire to see you. She wishes to explain to you that she did her utmost to prevent this unfortunate duel."

"I will make a point of calling upon her," replied Stanley.

"You will find her in Berkeley-square," said Mr. Dawson.

After some further conversation with the solictor, on matters of business, Stanley took leave, promising to call again on the morrow.

He then drove to the railway station, where he gave certain directions respecting

his luggage: after which he proceeded to a fashionable tailor's in Bond-street and ordered such mourning as he required to be got ready without delay; and, lastly, he secured charming rooms at the York Hotel, Albemarle-street, where he ordered dinner.

XIV.

ROSE HYLTON.

BEFORE noon next day, the suit of sables, which Stanley had ordered, was sent him by the expeditious tailor, and attired in these sombre habiliments, and with a deep band round his hat, the young man went to call upon Lady Starkey in Berkeley-square.

All the servants he beheld were in black, and upon being ushered into her ladyship's presence, he found her in the deepest mourning.

In her case, the garb of widowhood did not appear unbecoming.

She was alone at the time in her boudoir, and received him with great kindness; but on attempting to address him, she could not restrain her grief.

Stanley endeavoured to express his sympathy, but he likewise was much moved.

"It is very good of you to come to see me," she said. "I received a note last evening from Mr. Dawson, telling me I might expect you, and it gave me much satisfaction. I am sure you will believe that I could not have been instrumental in causing this deplorable duel. Though I had long lost my husband's affection, and though he had deeply injured me, I never ceased to love him, and could not have avenged myself in this way."

And she again covered her face, and sobbed allowed.

"Your ladyship need not give me that assurance," said Stanley.

Recovering, after a few moments, she continued :

"Intelligence of the fatal event was brought me by Captain Darcy himself. My mind foreboded ill when I beheld him. But on learning the dreadful truth, I loaded him with reproaches, and he left me—nor have I seen him since. The anguish caused me by the news was terrible. I could only think of my husband as he had once been —loving and devoted,—and I had now lost

him for ever! But by degrees I became calmer, and though I feel I shall never be happy again, yet I can bear my affliction."

"Possessing such a wife, I cannot understand how Sir Thomas could leave you," said Stanley.

"I loved him too well," replied her ladyship, in tones that penetrated Stanley's heart. "Had I loved him less, he might have loved me more."

"I will not attempt to offer you consolation," he said; "but I feel for you most deeply."

A brief silence ensued, which was broken by her ladyship.

"I wish to give you my assurance," she said, in accents that proclaimed her sincerity, "that I am perfectly satisfied with what Sir Thomas has done for yourself and your mother. I confess I did not expect it —but it was well done—very well done. I trust you will become a worthy representative of the family."

"I will try to be so," replied Stanley, earnestly.

"You will always find a warm friend in me," continued her ladyship. "And had

your mother not been left you, I would have endeavoured to supply her place."

"I know not how to express my gratitude to your ladyship," said Stanley, with much emotion.

At this moment, the door opened, and a remarkably pretty girl, apparently about nineteen, entered the room.

A slight, graceful figure, lovely features, blue eyes, and light tresses constituted her charms.

"My niece, Rose Hylton," said Lady Starkey, presenting her to Stanley, who had risen on her appearance. "I forgot to mention that she is staying with me."

"I knew Mr. Stanley Brereton was with you, aunt," said the young lady; "but I ventured to come in. Recent circumstances have made me take a strong interest in you," she added to Stanley.

"You are very kind," he replied. "I should have been sorry to lose the pleasure of seeing you. Have you been long in town, may I venture to ask?"

"I only arrived yesterday," she replied. "My aunt sent for me, and I came up from Sussex at once."

"I want a companion," said her ladyship,

"and dear Rose suits me better than any one else."

"I can easily imagine that," said Stanley. "I hope she will stay with you now she is come."

"I shall not part with her in a hurry," said Lady Starkey. "Unluckily, I cannot go out just now, and I am unable to offer her any amusement."

"You know my quiet tastes, dearest aunt," observed Rose. "I don't care for parties. A drive in the park is all I desire—and that I *can* have."

"Yes, I can promise you a daily drive," said her ladyship. "And perhaps we may sometimes meet Mr. Stanley Brereton."

"I hope so," observed Rose. "I shall look out for him."

"Then you must look out for me among the pedestrians," said Stanley; "for I have neither carriage nor horses at present."

"But you will soon have both, I make no doubt," said Lady Starkey.

"Possibly," he rejoined, "but I don't mean to be in a hurry."

"Quite right," said Rose. "Papa always says you are sure to find what you want, if you wait for it."

"Do you ride much?" inquired Stanley.

"Not so much as I should like," she replied, "and never to hounds."

"There you differ from a young lady of my acquaintance," said Stanley. "She frequently heads the field, and sometimes comes in at the death. Perhaps your ladyship may know her—Miss Warburton, of Beaucliffe."

"I've heard of her," replied Lady Starkey. "But I don't wish Rose to resemble her."

"I've no desire to excel as an equestrian," said the young lady.

"Hunting, I think, leads to a great deal of mischief among girls," said Lady Starkey; "and gives them bold and masculine manners. They cannot constantly associate with this class of men, without acquiring their habits."

"I must confess there is some truth in your ladyship's observations," said Stanley.

"I hope you will never hunt, Rose," remarked Lady Starkey to her niece.

"After your strongly expressed disapproval, you may depend upon it I never will, dear aunt," replied Rose.

Here the footman entered and announced Sir John Lambert and Captain Darcy.

On hearing the latter name, Stanley was about to depart instantly, but Lady Starkey stopped him.

"Don't go," she said. "I particularly wish you to remain."

Next moment the two gentlemen were ushered into the room.

Sir John stepped forward, and shook hands with her ladyship, but Captain Darcy contented himself with bowing gravely.

Both noticed Stanley. Neither knew him but they guessed who he was.

"I hope your ladyship has in some degree recovered from the shock you have experienced," said Sir John.

Lady Starkey made a suitable reply.

"I hope your ladyship can now tolerate my presence," said Darcy. "Command me and I will instantly depart."

Lady Starkey motioned him to stay.

"It is now too late to remedy this unhappy affair," she said, addressing Darcy. "So I will not reproach you further."

"Clearly understand that I did not desire that the encounter should have a fatal termi-

nation," he replied. "A slight hurt would have satisfied me."

"But you acted contrary to my wishes in seeking a meeting," said her ladyship.

"My own honour was concerned," he rejoined. "I could not allow you to be thus wronged."

"No more of this, or I shall enjoin your instant departure," said Lady Starkey.

"I ought to tell you that Mr. Stanley Brereton is the last person who can complain of what I have done," said Darcy, significantly.

"My uncle has left me a legacy of vengeance, and I shall not neglect it," said Stanley, sternly.

"This is neither the time, nor the place, for talk like this, gentlemen," interposed Sir John Lambert. "But I must say that Mr. Stanley Brereton very properly resents the affront offered him."

"Then I am very sorry for what I have said," rejoined Darcy, "and sincerely beg Mr. Brereton's pardon. I really meant no offence, sir," he added to Stanley.

"That I can readily understand, Captain Darcy," said Stanley; "and I therefore

accept your proffered hand. Let us forget the matter."

"Agreed," said Darcy.

Sir John Lambert seemed much relieved that an end had been put to the quarrel—but his anxiety had been nothing to that felt by Lady Starkey, who blamed herself greatly for detaining Stanley.

Rose, who had repressed her feelings during the scene, and did not utter a word, kept near her aunt.

Very soon afterwards, Darcy took his departure, much to her ladyship's relief.

Sir John did not accompany him, but remained to set himself straight.

"Darcy is a strange, impracticable fellow," he said. "He came here to sue for your ladyship's forgiveness, and he has given fresh offence. I am sure he had no desire whatever to quarrel with Mr. Stanley Brereton, and yet he contrived to do so."

"As far as I am concerned, I shall think no more about the occurrence," said Stanley. "But I owe something to my uncle's memory, and I don't care to associate with the man by whose hand my benefactor has fallen. I must therefore decline to meet Captain Darcy again."

"I don't wonder at your decision," said Lady Starkey. "I hoped the meeting would have had a different result, but it cannot be helped."

"I trust I have given you no offence, Mr. Brereton," said Sir John.

"I am much pleased to have met you," replied the other.

"And I hope you will often meet Sir John again here," said her ladyship. "He is one of my oldest and best friends."

"It will always be a pleasure to me to meet him," replied Stanley.

He then proposed to depart, and as he took leave, Lady Starkey expressed a hope that he would come to her next day.

"Pray do!" added Rose, with a smile that was quite irresistible.

"We have a great deal more to talk about," said her ladyship.

Rose looked as if she thought so too, but did not give utterance to her sentiments.

Stanley gladly promised to come, and made his bow.

"A very nice young man, and deserves his good fortune," observed Sir John.

"I have taken a great liking to him," said Lady Starkey; "and am really much

pleased that Sir Thomas made him his heir."

"Your ladyship displays great liberality," said the old baronet.

"Pray come to luncheon to-morrow, Sir John, and improve your acquaintance with him," said Lady Starkey.

XV.

STANLEY RECEIVES A LETTER FROM HIS MOTHER.

On coming down to breakfast next morning, Stanley found a letter from his mother. It had been sent by the solicitors, to whose care it was addressed.

Strange to say there was a good deal in it about Lady Starkey, and Mrs. Brereton expressed a hope that her son would not fail to call in Berkeley-square.

"I particularly wish you to see her ladyship," she said, "as she might be hurt by any neglect at this moment, and I should be much grieved if such were the case. As you are well aware, Lady Starkey and I have not met for several years, nor has any correspondence taken place between us during that period, but I have the highest

opinion of her. I think she has conducted herself admirably well towards my poor brother, under most trying circumstances. Indeed, I firmly believe very few of her sex could have acted as well as she has done. Possibly she may not be altogether satisfied with the disposition made by Sir Thomas in regard to his property; but I trust, as she herself is so well off, she may be reconciled to the arrangement. At any rate, I beg you will offer her my sincere sympathy under her affliction. With an expression of the warm regard and respect I always feel for her."

"I am very glad my mother has written this letter," thought Stanley. "I'll take it with me to-day, and read it to her ladyship. I wish they could meet, as I believe they would like each other. Since my interview with her ladyship yesterday, I seem to know her much better than before, and I must be insensible indeed if I did not now appreciate her extraordinary kindness."

While making these reflections, he had laid down the letter, but now took it up again, and perceived a postscript, which he had not previously noticed.

Thus it ran: "Lady Talmash and Mil-

dred Warburton rode over here this morning, with the evident intention of looking at the house. They stayed about half an hour, and her ladyship, who is a most charming person, made herself very agreeable. I don't know why, but I wasn't so much pleased as usual with Mildred. She seemed in an ill humour, and Minshull told me he overheard her say to Lady Talmash that she disliked the old house, and could never make up her mind to live in it. I tell you this, dear boy, because I think you ought to know it."

"Dislikes the place, does she?" cried Stanley to himself. "I'm glad I know it. She shall never be forced to live there. She must have changed her mind quite suddenly, for she used to like it—at least she led me to believe so. But I can guess the reason of the change, and if she resents a slight matter thus, I had better think no more about her. I am very glad this quarrel has occurred before I commenced my alterations. I'll leave the old place as it is, for the present."

Vexed by this disagreeable intelligence, Stanley made a very poor breakfast, nor could he even read the *Times*.

So he sat down at a side table and wrote a letter to his mother, telling her how much he had been pleased by his visit to Lady Starkey, and making some slight mention of Rose Hylton, whom he described as a very nice girl.

"As to Mildred's dislike of the old house, it is quite immaterial," he said. "I don't think she will ever be asked to reside there."

Having finished his letter and left it to be posted, he went out and strolled into the park.

The fine weather had brought out a number of equestrians. Amongst these the majority were young ladies with their attendants. There were likewise a few carriages.

Having heard Rose say that she and her aunt drove out early, Stanley looked out for them, and ere long discovered her ladyship's brougham.

Both ladies were inside it, and perceiving him at the same time, they stopped the carriage, and Stanley went up to them immediately.

"I fancied we should meet you in the park this morning, Mr. Brereton," said

Rose. "What a delightful day for a drive or a walk."

"Charming," he replied. "Your ladyship is quite right to take advantage of it."

"I always come here early, if the day is fine," she replied. "I don't care for a crowd of fashionable folks, and prefer the park as it is at present."

"Have you been long here, Mr. Brereton?" asked Rose.

"No, I have only just come out," he replied. "I have been writing to my mother, and have received a letter from her, in which she speaks of your ladyship in terms that I think will please you."

"I should much like to hear what she says," observed Lady Starkey.

"There is the letter," replied Stanley, taking it from his pocket, and giving it her.

Opening it and glancing at its contents, she seemed deeply moved.

"Will you leave this letter with me for a short time?" she remarked to Stanley. "I should like to read it again when alone. I need not say how much gratified I am by your mother's good opinion."

"Take it by all means," replied Stanley.

"You can place entire faith in my mother's sincerity."

"I know I can," replied Lady Starkey. "Pray tell the coachman to drive home. We shall see you anon."

Having done her ladyship's behest, Stanley bowed and withdrew.

XVI.

A GHOST STORY

"I AM very glad we happened to meet with Mr. Brereton, aunt," said Rose. "His mother's letter seems to have pleased you."

"It has pleased me exceedingly," replied her aunt. "She has spoken of me in most gratifying terms, such as I had no reason to expect from her, for there has been a kind of estrangement between us. But I am truly glad it is at an end."

"Does her son resemble his mother, aunt?" inquired Rose.

"Very strongly," replied Lady Starkey.

"Then she must be extremely handsome," said Rose. "I should like to see her."

"I hope you will see her soon," rejoined Lady Starkey.

Rose looked at her for some explanation, but received none.

On arriving at the house in Berkeley-square, Lady Starkey's first business was to seek a private interview with her confidential servant, Mrs. Thomson, whom she found in her own room.

Mrs. Thomson was about forty, had a very pleasing expression of countenance, and was remarkably neat in her attire.

She was engaged on some needlework when her ladyship entered, but immediately laid it down and arose.

"I want your advice, Thomson," said Lady Starkey. "But first of all, I must read you this letter. It is from Mrs. Brereton to her son."

Mrs. Thomson listened to the letter and expressed her approval of it.

"I feel certain she is sincere," she said. "What she says of your ladyship is quite true, and very gratifying."

"I mean to ask her to stay with me a short time, Thomson. Do you think she will come?"

"Whether she comes or not, my lady, she cannot fail to be pleased by the invitation."

"I should like her to meet my niece," said Lady Starkey, after a moment's hesitation. "I believe Miss Rose would produce a favourable impression upon her."

"No doubt of it," replied Mrs. Thomson, who now began to comprehend her ladyship's scheme. "Miss Rose is very amiable and engaging."

"Then Mrs. Brereton shall be asked at once," said her ladyship. "I must tell you there is something more in this letter, which seems to intimate that a quarrel has taken place between Stanley and a young lady whom I fancy he admires."

"So much the better," observed Mrs. Thomson. "Now is the time to supplant her."

"Since the plan meets your approval, Thomson, I'll set about it at once."

And proceeding to her boudoir, she wrote a very kind letter inviting Mrs. Brereton to come and spend a month with her.

"You shall be as quiet as you please," she said. "I have only my niece, Rose Hylton, staying with me, a very nice, amiable girl, with whom I feel certain you will be pleased. Before concluding, let me

again thank you for the kind manner in which you have spoken of me to your son."

Just as she had finished her letter, Rose came into the room, and called out:

"I am sure you have been writing to Mrs. Brereton, aunt."

"I have asked her to spend a month with me," was the reply.

"Oh! I'm so glad," cried Rose. "But do you think she'll come?"

"I hope so," replied Lady Starkey. "But Stanley will be better able than I am to answer that question."

Shortly afterwards, the young man himself made his appearance, and expressed a decided opinion that his mother would be delighted to accept the invitation.

"Then I will prepare for her," said Lady Starkey. "Here is your letter. By-the-by, I gather from the postscript—at which, perhaps, I ought not to have looked—that you are about to make some alterations in your old house."

"I intend to restore it," replied Stanley. "But I shall postpone my design for the present."

"When you do restore the old place,

I hope you will preserve its original character."

"Such is my intention," said Stanley. "But Miss Warburton, who has called there since my departure, does not think it can ever be made fit to live in."

"Her tastes must differ materially from mine," said Rose. "From what I have heard of it, Brereton must be a very picturesque old place."

"So it is," replied Stanley. "I should like to show it you."

"We must run down and have a look at it, after your mother's visit," said Lady Starkey.

"I shall hold you to your promise, and I engage to adopt any suggestions you may offer."

"That's very rash," rejoined Rose. "We may recommend you to alter the dining-room, to enlarge the drawing-room, to build a new gallery, and a new staircase."

"No, I'm safe there," he replied. "Those are the best parts of the house, and only want restoring."

"Haven't you a haunted chamber?" asked Rose. "Brereton wouldn't be perfect without one."

"We are already provided with a ghost," said Stanley. "But the haunted room is now shut up, and the ghost never leaves it."

"Have you ever slept in the room?" inquired Lady Starkey.

"Not very lately," replied Stanley. "But I have occupied the large, antique, four-post bed that forms part of the original furniture of the apartment. What is more, I have seen the ghost."

"Oh! do tell us all about it," cried Rose

"Before I begin," replied Stanley, "you ought to know that the perturbed spirit is that of the beautiful Dame Dorothy Massey, whose charms gave her a host of admirers in the days of James the First. Her husband, Sir Hubert, was very jealous, and is thought to have poisoned her. For my own part, though I had often heard of the apparition, I didn't believe in it—but, strange to say, I had never tested the truth of the story.

"One night, however, the large old bed was prepared for me, and I took possession of it.

"Not feeling any alarm, I soon fell asleep, but was awakened about an hour

after midnight, as I conjectured, by some sound in the room.

"On opening my eyes I was surprised to perceive a light, and when I raised myself to see what caused it, I beheld a female figure standing near the foot of the bed.

"I knew it must be the lovely Dorothy, for we have a portrait of her in the dining-room, and the features, figure, and dress, so far as I could judge, seemed precisely similar.

"The curtains of the bed were drawn back, and the phantom appeared to gaze at me steadfastly.

"I tried to address it, but could not utter a word. After awhile it vanished, and the light died away at the same time.

"I remained quiet till morning, and have since thought that the vision might be a dream."

"Now you have spoiled your ghost story," cried Rose. "If it was nothing but a dream, I don't care for it. But we must see the haunted room, if we go to Brereton."

"So you shall," replied Stanley. "It is now shut up, as I have told you; but I will have it opened. Several persons have seen

Dame Dorothy's ghost—amongst others, our old man-servant, Minshull, who, according to his own statement, spoke to it, but got no response."

Just then, Sir John Lambert was ushered in, and the footman said that luncheon was served; whereupon, Sir John gave his arm to her ladyship, and Stanley took charge of Rose.

XVII.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING IN ST. JAMES'S PARK.

At luncheon, Sir John Lambert remarked that a great improvement had taken place in her ladyship's spirits.

It was quite evident that she took a strong interest in the two young people, and it struck Sir John forcibly that she wished to make up a match between them. He was not surprised at this, since Stanley was now very well off; and though Rose had nothing to speak of—her father being a man of very moderate property, who lived upon a small estate in Sussex—he knew that her aunt had just settled 2000*l.* upon her—the exact sum, in fact, paid to her ladyship by Sir Thomas, just before his unfortunate death.

Of course, Sir John was informed that

an invitation was about to be sent to Mrs. Brereton, and it was hoped she would accept it, but this only confirmed his views. He, therefore, lent all the assistance he could to the plan, and persuaded himself he was of considerable service. Lady Starkey thought so too, and encouraged him by her looks.

Thus all seemed to go well for the scheme.

And here it may be asked whether Stanley had really transferred his affections from Mildred to Rose. Only a few days ago he seemed passionately enamoured of the former, and believed that his happiness entirely depended upon her. Now, he had altered his mind. And just when he had resolved to forget her he had come across Rose, who seemed exactly calculated to fill her place. Rose was quite as good-looking as Mildred, and almost as attractive, while she was entirely free from the faults of the more dazzling beauty.

Stanley was very anxious that his mother should see Rose, feeling almost certain she would prefer her to Mildred, to whom he knew she had many objections, and seriously doubted whether she would suit him.

Despite all his efforts, however, he could

not entirely banish Mildred's image from his breast. She had completely fascinated him and he was not, as yet, freed from the spell.

As to Rose herself, there was no doubt she was greatly interested in her admirer, and had half lost her heart to him. She thought him exceedingly handsome, and very agreeable. Moreover, the encouragement given her by her aunt had fanned the rising flame, and raised hopes in her bosom, which might not otherwise have been indulged.

Hence, owing to the combined efforts of her ladyship and Sir John, affairs made rapid progress, and Stanley began to feel that he must pause, unless he meant decidedly to commit himself.

After luncheon, the party repaired to the drawing-room, where the same sort of talk went on for some time longer, when the gentlemen took leave, though not before Stanley had invited the ladies and Sir John to dine with him next day, at the Star and Garter, Richmond.

On quitting Berkeley-square, Stanley and the old baronet walked down Regent-street to St. James's Park, the chief subject of

their discourse being Rose, concerning whom Sir John expressed himself in rapturous terms, declaring she was the nicest girl he knew.

"So I think—with one exception," replied Stanley.

"And pray who is the exception?" inquired Sir John.

"Mildred Warburton, only daughter—only child, in fact—of Squire Warburton, as we call him, of Beaucliffe House, Cheshire."

"I know the old squire, and a capital fellow he is," cried Sir John. "He has often asked me to come and see him at Beaucliffe, but I have never been there. And so his daughter is very handsome—eh?"

"Remarkably so," replied Stanley. "She is considered the chief beauty in Cheshire, where there are plenty of handsome girls. But, good Heavens!—what do I behold? Did I not think it quite impossible, I should say that yonder are the squire and Mildred, with their friend Lady Talmash, coming towards us."

"You are quite right," replied Sir John. "I know Mr. Warburton and Lady Tal-

mash, and there they both are; and, of course, the pretty girl with them is the squire's daughter."

Stanley replied in the affirmative, adding that he fancied they were all in Cheshire, and could not understand how they came to be in St. James's Park.

Presently the others came up, and exclamations of surprise were uttered.

"How strange we should meet you thus!" cried the squire. "Why, we are only just arrived in town, and here we find you the very first thing!"

"It is purely accidental that I happened to be here," replied Stanley.

"At all events it's very lucky. I'm right glad to have stumbled upon you. But is not this my old friend, Sir John Lambert?"

"You are right, Mr. Warburton," replied the other, "and delighted I am to see you."

Sir John then addressed himself to Lady Talmash, who seemed very much pleased to see him, after which the old baronet was presented by her father to Mildred, whom he could not help thinking merited the eulogium just passed upon her by Stanley.

An explanation of the unlooked-for

appearance of the squire and the ladies was then offered.

Mildred wanted to buy a horse, and her good-natured sire, who never refused her anything, had brought her up to town for the purpose. Lady Talmash had accompanied them at Mildred's particular request.

They had set out on the journey that very morning, and on arriving, about two hours previously, had put up at the Grosvenor Hotel.

"Where are you staying, Stanley?" asked the squire.

"At the York Hotel, Albemarle-street," replied the other.

"Well, come and dine with us at the Grosvenor, if you have no better engagement? And if you will condescend to accept so short an invitation, Sir John, I shall be most happy to see you at the same time."

The invitation was put so agreeably, that the old baronet could not refuse it, and Stanley likewise accepted.

After a little more talk, the party turned round and proceeded slowly along the Mall, past Marlborough House towards Buckingham Palace.

Somehow or other, Stanley found himself by the side of Mildred, while the others walked on in front. He did not seek an explanation, but could not avoid it.

"Do you know that I was very angry with you when you left Beaucliffe the other day," said Mildred. "Why did you run away so suddenly—especially, when I asked you to remain? Tell me that, sir?"

"I cannot defend my conduct," replied Stanley. "But I thought you too exacting."

"I asked no more than I had a right to expect from one who professed himself devoted to me," she rejoined. "I was very much hurt by your hasty departure, I assure you, and haven't quite forgiven you yet."

"I'm sorry for that," replied Stanley. "But I don't think I was much in fault."

"You are aware that I expect implicit obedience to my commands?"

"Yes, I know you expect it," he replied. "But what if I don't feel inclined to render it?"

"Ah! did I hear aright?" she rejoined, looking at him in surprise.

"Shall I repeat what I said?" he asked.

"No occasion to do that," she replied, haughtily.

"I am almost of the same opinion," he said, "apparently, you will never be satisfied with such homage as I can tender."

"This is *not* homage but defiance," she cried sharply. "I begin to think you no longer love me."

"It would be useless to maintain the contrary, when it is clear you won't believe me," he rejoined, coldly.

"Now I am convinced you are changed," she cried. "Don't say another word. I won't listen to you."

"As you please. But for a time, at least, let us maintain a semblance of regard."

"I don't mind that. But understand that all is at an end between us."

At this moment, a very seasonable interruption was offered by Lady Talmash, who quitted the two gentlemen and joined them.

Whether she guessed what was going on we cannot tell, but it looked very like it.

"I hope the little misunderstanding that

occurred at Beaucliffe the other day, has been quite settled?" she said, turning from one to the other.

"Quite," replied Stanley.

"You don't answer, Mildred?" she remarked.

"I've nothing to say," returned the other.

"I'm afraid that *is* an answer. But do let me have the satisfaction of arranging this little quarrel, which both will regret, if it goes on. I don't know what has occurred, but I know what trifles lovers' quarrels generally are in the beginning, and how important they sometimes become in the end. I'm sure you like each other—love each other, I ought to say—so pray forget what has happened, and be friends."

"I quite appreciate the kindness of your ladyship's motives," said Stanley, "and am quite ready to obey you."

"And you, Mildred?" asked her ladyship. "What do you say?"

"If Stanley owns himself in the wrong I will forgive him, not otherwise," was the reply.

Lady Talmash looked entreatingly at the young man.

"Surely, you won't hesitate?" she said.

"No, I was very much in the wrong," he replied, "and I intended to say so."

"That's enough," cried Mildred. "Now we are friends again!"

At this moment, the two elderly gentlemen in front came to a halt.

"We must now make our way to Tattersall's," said the squire. "We have to inquire about a horse—that's our business in town. We won't ask you to accompany us, Sir John."

"I can't, or I would with pleasure," replied the old baronet.

"Come with us, and give us an opinion," said Mildred to Stanley.

"Unluckily I have an appointment in a different direction, and you are just as well without me, for my opinion about a horse is worth nothing."

"Well, we shall see you both at the Grosvenor at seven," said the squire.

The parties then separated. Mr. Warburton and the ladies proceeding along Grosvenor-place to Hyde Park Corner, and the others making their way by St. James's Palace to Pall Mall.

"The squire is as cheery as ever, I find,"

said Sir John. "And what a charming girl is his daughter! I don't wonder you admire her."

"I don't admire her so much as Rose Hylton," replied Stanley.

"Humph!" exclaimed Sir John, sceptically.

"What I mean is this," said Stanley. "I am of opinion Rose would make the better wife of the two."

"There I agree with you," replied Sir John.

XVIII.

TATTERSALL'S.

When the party approached the famous rendezvous of racing men and turfites, they perceived a tall, pleasant-looking, fresh-complexioned personage, buttoned up tightly across his broad chest, in a dark, grey riding coat, standing near the entrance of the subscription room, and conversing with two gentlemen, who had rather a military look.

The chief person in the group towards whom the squire's gaze was directed was Mr. Tattersall himself, who, we may mention, is not only a very good specimen of an Englishman, but a lineal descendant of the famous Captain Tattersall, who conveyed the fugitive Charles the Second

in his brig the *Swiftsure*, from Shoreham to Fécamp.

The two gentlemen talking to him were our old acquaintances, Captain Darcy and Colonel Ratcliffe.

"There's Tattersall himself," exclaimed the squire. "We're very lucky in finding him here. We shall now be able to transact our business without delay."

"I'm very glad of that, papa," replied Mildred. "I feared we might be detained some time."

Mr. Tattersall came to them very quickly. Knowing the squire, and seeing he wanted to speak to him, he left the others and came to him.

Having introduced him to the ladies, the squire stated his business.

"We are just come up from Cheshire to see you, Mr. Tattersall," he said. "We understand you have a first-rate hunter to sell."

"I have several first-rate hunters to sell, Mr. Warburton," replied Tattersall, smiling. "But I can guess the horse you allude to. It is thorough bred—without fault of any kind, and would exactly suit a lady. Perhaps it is intended for your daughter, of

whose equestrian achievements I have heard much. If so, I should say it would exactly suit her."

"You are quite right, Mr. Tattersall," said Mildred. "I *do* require a horse—an accident having happened to my best hunter—and have come to you to supply my want. I know you can do so if you will."

"I shall be delighted to serve you, Miss Warburton," replied Tattersall, bowing. "The horse I have so highly commended belongs to the gentleman you see yonder—Captain Darcy. But I must tell you he wants a long price—more than you may like to give."

"What's his price, Tattersall, do you know?" said the squire.

"Three hundred," replied the other.

"By Jove! that *is* a long figure," exclaimed the squire.

"If the horse answers Mr. Tattersall's description, I *must* have it—cost what it may," said Mildred.

"I pledge my word that all I have said is correct," rejoined Tattersall.

"That's enough," cried the squire. "By-the-by, is this the Captain Darcy who shot

Sir Thomas Starkey in a duel at Dieppe the other day?"

Tattersall replied in the affirmative.

"It was an unfortunate affair," he added. "And I particularly regret it, for Sir Thomas was a good friend of mine."

While this conversation took place the two officers had been looking at Mildred, and were greatly struck by her beauty.

"That's the prettiest girl I've seen for some time," said Darcy. "Who the deuce can she be?"

"Evidently the daughter of that old fellow," replied the colonel. "I think Tattersall said he is Mr. Warburton, of Beaucliffe House."

"I should like very much to know her," said Darcy.

"The stylish-looking woman with them is Lady Talmash," said the colonel. "I have a slight acquaintance with her."

Just then Tattersall came up, and, addressing Darcy, told him that Mr. Warburton would be glad to speak to him.

"I think he'll buy your famous hunter," he said. "He wants the horse for his daughter, who is the boldest and best lady rider in Cheshire."

"I've heard of her," replied Darcy. "Did you tell him my price?"

"Yes; he makes no objection," said Tattersall.

"Come on, then," said Darcy.

The two officers were then introduced to the squire and the ladies.

"We hear you have a wonderful horse to sell, Captain Darcy," said the squire.

"There isn't his match in Cheshire, Mr. Warburton, I'll answer for that," was the reply.

"Nor anywhere else," added the colonel.

"May I ask why you are parting with him?" inquired Mildred.

"Because I'm giving up hunting," said Darcy. "I grieve to part with him, but shall be reconciled to the loss if I sell him to you."

"You are very polite," replied Mildred. "But you ask a terribly long price."

"Not more than I gave," said Darcy.

"Well, if he answers to your description, we shan't quarrel about the price," said the squire. "When can we see the horse?"

"When you please," replied Darcy. "He's now in Mr. Tattersall's stables."

"Let us go and look at him at once,

dear papa," cried Mildred, eagerly. "By the way, what's his name?" she added to Darcy.

"Lionel—same as my own," he replied, smiling.

The whole party then adjourned to a yard at the back of the premises, where no one was allowed to intrude at the time.

Lionel was brought out by a groom, and elicited general admiration.

"Upon my soul! I never saw a finer horse," exclaimed the squire.

"I won't say anything further in his praise," remarked Tattersall. "You are quite as good a judge of a horse as I am, squire."

"You pay me a high compliment, sir," said Mr. Warburton, much gratified.

"Not more than you deserve, sir," replied Tattersall.

"What does Miss Warburton think of him?" asked Darcy. "I should very much like to have her opinion."

"If I praise him you won't increase the price?"

"Can you suppose it possible?" he replied.

"Well, then, I'm sure he'll suit me admirably," she said. "I like him better than any horse I ever saw. You must buy him, dear papa!"

"Well, if I must—I must, I suppose," rejoined the squire.

"Better try him first," counselled Tattersall. "He shall be sent to where you please, to-morrow morning. You don't object, eh, captain?"

"Not in the least," replied Darcy. "Miss Warburton can give her own orders."

"Then send him to the Grosvenor Hotel at ten o'clock to-morrow morning," said Mildred.

"I must also get you to send me a horse," said the squire. "And another perhaps for your ladyship, eh?"

"I certainly cannot be left out," said Lady Talmash.

"I can furnish you with a riding habit," said Mildred. "Luckily, I have brought a couple with me, and I dare say one of them will fit you."

"Not a doubt of it," replied her ladyship; "we are just about the same size."

"May I be allowed to attend the party,

squire?" said Darcy. "And perhaps my friend Colonel Ratcliffe may have permission likewise?"

"We shall be very glad to have you both with us," replied the squire.

It being now quite understood that if the horse answered all expectations at the proposed trial on the morrow, it was to become Mr. Warburton's at the price mentioned; the squire and the two ladies left Hyde Park Corner, and proceeded to the Grosvenor.

"Are you aware that that charming girl is an only daughter?" remarked the colonel to Darcy. "She'll have a large fortune."

"A very large fortune," echoed Tattersall. "She's a great Cheshire heiress."

"And well worth looking after," said the colonel. "But you'll have a great many rivals."

The two friends then took their departure, Darcy being well satisfied with his day's work.

XIX.

RICHMOND PARK.

A VERY good dinner was given at the Grosvenor by the squire. And it was thoroughly enjoyed, at least by himself and Sir John Lambert.

Stanley and Mildred sat next to each other, but did not talk much, and there seemed a certain restraint between them, which Lady Talmash did not fail to notice, though she herself kept up a very lively conversation with Mr. Warburton.

Both Stanley and Sir John were greatly surprised to learn that the squire had bought a horse for his daughter from Captain Darcy, and hoped the purchase would turn out well.

Sir John was quite aware that Darcy had a famous hunter, but he did not know that

he meant to sell it. Stanley made no remark, but he was far from pleased.

Lady Talmash did her best to bring about a perfect reconciliation between the lovers, but was not entirely successful. The squire saw there was something amiss, but thought it best not to interfere.

In the course of the evening, Stanley invited the squire and the ladies to dine with him next day at the Star and Garter, Richmond, to meet Lady Starkey and her niece, and the invitation was accepted, though rather against Mildred's wish.

"This will do very well," said the squire. "We can ride through Richmond Park, and give the horse a gallop. We shall then see how he behaves. What time do you dine?"

"Early—not later than six," replied Stanley.

"Can't you ask Captain Darcy and Colonel Ratcliffe to join the party?" said Mildred to Stanley.

"Not very well," he replied. "The recent duel with Sir Thomas Starkey is a difficulty."

"Oh! yes, I see," replied Mildred. "We'll say no more about it."

Before separating, it was arranged that Stanley and Sir John should go down first to Richmond and order dinner at the Star and Garter; while the others could find their way there as they chose.

The arrangement seemed to please the squire vastly.

"Couldn't be better!" he cried, rubbing his hands. "Couldn't be better."

Next morning, at the appointed hour, the famous hunter was sent to the Grosvenor, together with two other very good-looking horses—one intended for Lady Talmash, and the other for the squire.

Both ladies were equipped for the expedition, and the riding-habit, lent to Lady Talmash by Mildred, looked as if made for her.

Enraptured at the sight of her new horse, Mildred clapped her hands with delight, crying out:

"There he is! How well he looks, papa!"

The squire was of the same opinion, and so was Lady Talmash.

Mildred was all eagerness to try him, nor had she long to wait.

Punctual to the appointment, Darcy and

Colonel Ratcliffe made their appearance, and leaving their horses in charge of the grooms entered the hotel.

They found the ladies and the squire in the hall, and after a general expression of satisfaction at the fineness of the day, which everybody said would render the ride most agreeable, they all came forth.

The colonel now led Lady Talmash to the horse intended for her, while Darcy, almost ceremoniously, assisted Mildred to mount.

As the young lady, whip in hand, placed herself lightly and gracefully in the saddle, the eyes of both officers were fixed upon her with admiration, and the grooms thought she looked like a picture.

In a few minutes more the whole party had mounted, and were taking their way through Knightsbridge to Kensington, headed by Darcy and his fair companion, and followed by the grooms.

The little cavalcade attracted the greatest attention as it proceeded on its course, and everybody wanted to know the name of the lovely girl riding in front.

It was quite impossible, indeed, not to be

struck by Mildred's appearance on her new horse.

Never had she looked so well before—so thought her father, and so thought everybody else. The new hunter, which was very showy-looking, seemed quite proud of his fair burden, and walked with statelier step than usual.

Darcy could not help complimenting the young lady on her perfect seat on horseback.

"You must excuse me, Miss Warburton," he said, "but I cannot help telling you how well you look. Till now this horse has never been properly ridden. You sit him to perfection, and I am certain he knows you do so."

"You flatter me, Captain Darcy," she rejoined—by no means displeased.

"No; I am telling you the exact truth," he said. "A horse always knows when he has got a good rider, and I am certain Lionel feels your power, and longs to show you what he can do."

"I'll put his obedience to the test, as soon as we enter Richmond Park," she rejoined, smiling.

"I shall be very much surprised—very much disappointed—if you don't find him everything you could wish," said Darcy. "What does your ladyship think of him," he added, appealing to Lady Talmash.

"I think he justifies all that has been said in his praise," she replied. "He exactly suits Miss Warburton."

"Precisely my opinion," remarked Colonel Ratcliffe.

"Yes; I think my daughter *is* suited at last!" cried the squire, laughing.

Reserving any trial they intended to make for Richmond Park, the party proceeded at a leisurely pace across Hammersmith Bridge, and did not even get beyond a walk on Barnes Common.

Mildred found some difficulty in restraining her impetuous steed, but she would not let him have his own way for the present.

At length they reached the lodge gate, and entered the park.

As we have already intimated, there could not have been a more delightful morning for a ride—bright and sunshiny—but not too warm.

The charming park was seen to the

greatest advantage. The turf was in splendid condition, and seemed to invite a gallop. The trees were in full foliage, and beneath them couched both red and fallow deer—the latter being the most numerous. The sheets of water looked like lakes, and materially heightened the beauty of the picture. Nothing, in short, was wanting to render the place enjoyable, and though all three gentlemen had often been there before, they thought they had never seen the park look so enchanting.

After riding on for a couple of hundred yards, the party came to a halt. It had been decided that the trial should be made partly along the road, and partly over the turf.

First of all, a short but careful examination of the horse was made by the squire, who could not find a fault with him.

These preliminaries gone through, Mildred called out:

"Now for a gallop! Keep with me if you can, Captain Darcy!"

At the slightest touch possible of the whip Lionel, whose impatience had been greatly increased by the delay, started off at full speed over the turf.

Darcy found it impossible to obey the command he had received—nor could any of the others keep near the fair equestrian, who laughed as she left them behind.

Before she had gone more than half a mile the gallant captain, who did his best, had lost all chance, and the rest were nowhere.

But Mildred went on—rather increasing than slackening her pace—till she reached the skirts of the terrace, whence such a lovely view is obtained of the valley with the Thames winding through it, and Windsor Castle crowning the heights in the distance.

Here she drew in the rein, and turned round to look for her friends.

They were not far behind. Finding it impossible to keep up with her, Darcy had desisted from the attempt.

Several persons were on the terrace, surveying the charming prospect, and they loudly expressed their admiration of her performance.

Not caring for so much homage, Mildred rode back to her friends, and the whole party set off towards another part of the park.

As soon as they had got rid of the spectators, the young lady tried a second gallop, with as much success as the first.

In this instance her course led her to the widest part of the park, and here she was checked, at length, by furze bushes and ferns.

"Well, does the horse answer your expectations, Miss Warburton?" asked Darcy, as he came up.

"Surpasses them," she replied.

"I'm truly glad to hear it," he rejoined. "It will always be a satisfaction to me that I have been able to provide you with a horse worthy of you."

"I shall ever feel obliged to you, I'm sure, Captain Darcy," she replied.

Everybody thought the trial had now been quite sufficient to establish the horse's reputation, and both Lady Talmash and Colonel Ratcliffe congratulated the young lady on her acquisition.

But not one of the party—not Mildred herself—looked better pleased than the squire. More than once have we said that nothing delighted him so much as to be able to gratify his daughter's whims, and

on this occasion he saw that he had succeeded.

But though the trial was over, the party did not quit the park. They found it so attractive that they could not tear themselves away, but rode about in different directions.

As to Darcy, he could not avoid the fate that had befallen many others in attendance on Mildred, but was compelled to submit to her fascinations.

As they had got rid of the others—together with the grooms—he thought he might venture on a little private talk with her.

XX.

A DECLARATION.

"I WAS very sorry to hear, Miss Warburton," said Darcy, "that you are returning to Cheshire almost immediately. I hope it isn't true."

"We never intended to make any stay in town," she replied. "And our business will be finished to-morrow."

"So soon?" he cried.

"But we mean to call on Lady Starkey before we take our departure. We expect to meet her to-day. She is dining with her nephew, Stanley Brereton, at the Star and Garter."

"Would I were included in the party. We might possibly improve our acquaintance."

"I think I know you as well now as I should a month hence."

"Very likely. I carry my heart in my hand so that all may read it. Can you perceive nothing?"

"What would you have me perceive?" she rejoined.

"The greatest admiration of yourself. Never have I beheld any one so charming. You look incredulous, but 'tis true!"

"I shall be angry if you pay me such extravagant compliments."

"Forgive me! I wouldn't for the world offend you. But I must tell you."

"Now you are about to compliment me again. Take care!"

"No, I am going to tell you something you may not be aware of. I have fallen desperately in love with you. Can you give me any encouragement?"

"Not much," she replied, laughing. "You have really taken me quite by surprise."

"Oh, you will soon recover from that. But pray don't laugh at me! Treat what I say seriously."

"If I do, it will be to bid you cease this nonsense."

"Do you call a declaration of love nonsense?"

"The greatest nonsense," she replied. "It means nothing."

"In this case it means that I offer you my heart and hand," he rejoined with great earnestness. "I have never met with any person who produced such an effect upon me—that I swear! Speak! decide my fate!"

While this discourse took place they were passing through a small wood, and no one beheld them—at least, so Darcy thought—for while putting the all-important question he drew as near as he could to Mildred's side, and taking her hand, raised it quickly to his lips.

She instantly withdrew it.

But not before the action had been witnessed by a person on horseback, who suddenly appeared at the further end of the wood, and was greatly surprised—and indeed displeased by what he beheld.

The observer was no other than Stanley Brereton.

Having learnt at dinner, on the day before, that Mildred was about to try a horse next morning in Richmond Park, he could not resist the temptation to be present at the time.

Accordingly, he deputed Sir John Lambert to order dinner at the Star and Garter, and came down alone to Richmond Park.

And this was what he beheld. If he could trust his eyes Darcy was now a favoured suitor.

Feeling sure he must be in the way, Stanley was about to retire instantly, when Mildred called to him to come on, and he obeyed.

On approaching her he bowed, and haughtily saluted Darcy.

"I fear I am in the way," he said. "But it was not my intention to intrude."

"You certainly are unexpected, but I'm very glad to see you. Is Lady Starkey here?"

"Somewhere, I believe," he replied, "in the park, but I've not seen her."

"We must try and find her," replied Mildred.

"But for this plaguy young fellow's appearance, my destiny might have been decided," whispered Darcy.

"Not as you seem to desire," she rejoined.

And they rode on.

On emerging from the wood, they perceived Lady Starkey's brougham coming towards them with her ladyship and Rose inside.

Darcy rode on first, and as he approached, the brougham stopped.

Thus left alone with Stanley for a few moments, Mildred endeavoured to explain what had just occurred, but he would not listen to her.

"Come, and let me present you to Lady Starkey and her niece," he said.

The introduction then took place, and both parties seemed mutually pleased. If Rose was struck by Mildred's beauty and graceful horsemanship, Mildred was no less surprised by Rose's good looks, for which she had not been prepared.

"I hope you like your new horse, Miss Warburton," said Lady Starkey. "He seems to suit you perfectly."

"I am delighted with him," replied Mildred. "He has gone through his trial admirably. All my wants are now supplied."

"All?" cried Darcy, who was not far off.

"Yes, all," she replied. "You ride, I suppose, Miss Hylton?"

"No," replied the other. "I have no horse."

"What say you to a walk?" remarked Lady Starkey to her niece. "We have been shut up in the brougham long enough."

Rose delightedly assented, and the two ladies came forth.

"Where shall we bend our steps?" cried Rose.

"You can't go wrong," said Stanley. "But I should advise you to shape your course towards the water yonder."

While these arrangements were being made, the rest of the party came up, and a general introduction took place. Lady Starkey and Lady Talmash seemed mutually pleased with each other, and Rose Hylton produced a favourable impression, except on Mildred. The squire seemed quite elated when Lady Starkey said she recollected him several years ago.

All those on horseback now dismounted, and committed their steeds to the care of the grooms, and the whole party walked towards the ponds.

The two ladies in riding-habits could

not get on quite so fast as the others, and Darcy once more found himself by the side of Mildred.

But Lady Talmash had received a hint, and kept near them.

"Lady Starkey's niece, Miss Hylton, is a very pretty girl," remarked Mildred.

"I hear people say so," replied Darcy; "but I can't discover her charms."

"You have the reputation of being a general admirer, Captain Darcy," said Lady Talmash.

"I scarcely think I merit the title," he rejoined, laughing.

"Despite your disclaimer, I believe my information is correct," said her ladyship. "I am told you are struck by every fresh face — always falling in love — yet most inconstant."

"You give me a very bad character," he replied. "Don't heed what her ladyship says," he added to Mildred.

"I intend it as a caution," said Lady Talmash.

"And I take it as such," replied Mildred.

"I would recommend your ladyship to give a similar caution to another young

lady," said Darcy. "Rose Hylton seems very much interested in what Stanley Brereton is saying to her."

"What *can* he be saying?" cried Mildred.

"Making love, of course," replied Darcy. "Lady Starkey has left them. It's a regular tête-à-tête."

The temptation to interrupt it was irresistible, and Mildred stepped quickly forward. Lady Talmash called to her to stop, but she paid no attention to what she said.

No doubt the two young people were annoyed, but they were obliged to cease their converse when Mildred came up.

"Now, you have paid me off for my interruption in the wood," said Stanley.

"You were quite mistaken in your notions then, as I told you," replied Mildred. "But if I am in the way I'll leave you instantly."

"No, pray don't," cried Rose. "We have no secrets."

"Are you quite sure of that?" asked Mildred.

"I was just remarking how much I should like Pembroke Lodge as a residence."

"But I don't think Lord Russell will let you have it," replied Stanley.

"It would be so enchanting to have those lovely herds of deer always in sight," continued Rose.

"I think the deer at Beaucliffe are quite as fine as these," said Mildred; "and I am sure the hall is a vast deal more picturesque than Pembroke Lodge, to say nothing of the park. Once upon a time you used greatly to admire the place," she added, to Stanley.

"I admire it still," he replied. "But you don't care for Brereton, and wouldn't like to live there."

"Who told you so?" she asked.

"A little bird that builds near the house," he replied.

"I shouldn't like it in its present state. But you mean to restore it—don't you?"

"I'm not sure. Lady Starkey and Miss Hylton are coming down to look at the old place, and then I shall decide."

"I feel convinced I shall like the house as it is," said Rose.

"Don't be too sure," rejoined Mildred. "It is really an old tumble-down place, as you will find."

"But very picturesque notwithstanding," said Stanley.

"That is what I bargain for," rejoined Rose. "Pembroke Lodge is too modern, too comfortable, too perfect. Give me the old mansion, and let me have the pleasure of repairing it."

Mildred said nothing more, but left them, and joined Lady Starkey and her father.

The party remained near the pond for some time, and then proceeded to the terrace.

XXI

A DINNER AT THE STAR AND GARTER.

Of all the charming places in the neighbourhood of town, where a good dinner can be had, none is so pleasant as the Star and Garter at Richmond.

The situation of the hotel is perfect, and the view it commands of Twickenham and the valley of the Thames from the large bow-windows, unrivalled. Then the garden with its smooth-shaven lawns and slopes is most attractive. As to the cuisine we need not say much in its praise, since it is well known that no better dinner can be obtained either at Saint Germain, or elsewhere, than at this admirable house.

The visitors to the Star and Garter on the present occasion were favoured with remarkably fine weather, so that nothing

more could be desired, and Sir John Lambert, who had arrived in good time, had taken care to order a first-rate dinner, with the best brand of champagne, and other light wines, and he felt quite certain his injunctions would be attended to carefully.

"Let us have whitebait—both plain and deviled," he said, "and let the champagne be introduced early. As to the rest of the dinner I leave it to you."

"You may depend upon a first-rate dinner, Sir John," said the manager.

"Place the table in the bow window of the upper room, and let covers be laid for ten," said Sir John.

"Your orders shall be strictly attended to," replied the manager.

Having got a notion that Stanley would not invite Darcy and Colonel Ratcliffe to the dinner, Sir John resolved to ask them himself.

Accordingly, when the party arrived at the hotel, he went up at once to the two gentlemen in question and expressed a hope that they would dine with him.

Both accepted, and the little difficulty was got over very satisfactorily.

Darcy would have been much annoyed if

he had been left out of the party, and he took care to acquaint Mildred with the invitation he had received from the old baronet.

Having mounted to the large upper room, where they proposed to dine, and gazed at the charming view spreading out before them, they returned to the garden, where some of them contrived to pass the time very agreeably.

At a suggestion from Mildred, half a dozen of the party walked down to the Thames, where they hired a boat, and went out for a row, the oars being taken by Darcy and Colonel Ratcliffe, and very well managed. The others who joined in this pleasant little trip were Lady Talmash, Stanley, and Rose.

The ladies were in tip-top spirits, and their light laughter enchanted all who heard them.

One of the chief *agrémens* of Richmond is the river, and no visit to this charming locality can be considered complete without a row.

Lady Talmash, who acted as a sort of chaperon to Mildred, noticed that Darcy had rather risen in favour with the young lady, but she did not deem it necessary to

interfere. As to Stanley, he devoted himself entirely to Rose.

After spending an hour on the water in the most enjoyable manner, the party returned towards the landing-place, when Mildred perceiving her father and Lady Starkey on the bank, sprang upon one of the seats, and in doing so, missed her footing, and slipped over the side of the boat.

In an instant all was consternation; nor was the accident without danger, since the river was deep in this part, but the young lady had not disappeared, Stanley seized hold of her, and held her up till she could be lifted into the boat.

Mr. Warburton and Lady Starkey, who had witnessed the accident from the bank, were greatly alarmed, and the ladies in the boat were much terrified, but Mildred did not lose her self-possession.

"I don't think I should have been drowned," she cried, as she made her reappearance in the boat, "for I am a tolerably good swimmer. The chief risk was my riding-habit, which might have weighed me down."

While sincere congratulations were offered on her escape, the boat was rowed quickly

to the landing-place, where it was met by the squire, who was much agitated.

Notwithstanding the dripping state of her dress, he tenderly embraced his daughter, and thanked Stanley warmly for the efficient aid he had rendered.

As soon as possible a carriage was procured, and Lady Talmash went with her friend to the hotel, where a change of dress was obtained without difficulty, and this being put on she seemed none the worse for the accident.

In fact, the occurrence, being unattended by any serious consequences, caused no alteration in the dinner-hour, or any other arrangements; while the young lady's spirits were not affected in the slightest degree.

Sir John had talked a good deal about the dinner, which quite answered his expectations. The table was ornamented with choice flowers, and looked very gay and attractive. The squire thought the white-bait delicious. We must bear in mind that country gentlemen don't get these delicacies quite as often as we Londoners do, and therefore think more of them.

"I had quite forgotten the taste of white-

bait," he said; "but it's all come back, and I declare there's nothing like it."

But he found there was something new reserved for him. Exquisite as was the fried fish, the deviled whitebait was still better, and when the waiter brought round the dish he could not resist helping himself a second time.

Sir John, likewise, made a remark that might be accepted as a culinary aphorism, "Never is a glass of iced champagne so good as after whitebait."

"I am entirely of that opinion," said the squire, "and therefore, I shall take another."

It is not our intention to go through the whole of the dinner, though we could easily do so, and yet not mention a single inferior dish. But we may say that the stewed eels were wonderful, and again brought the two old gentlemen to the fore. Even Lady Starkey could not resist them. However, we shall pass on to the ices, which were such as only this house can produce, and to those exquisite little cakes, known as maids-of-honour, which attracted all the ladies, and some of the gentlemen as well.

"I have to return you my thanks for this capital dinner," said the squire. "There hasn't been a single mistake. If I ever give a dinner here I'll get you to order it for me."

"I'll do it with pleasure," replied the old baronet. "I dare say I've given a hundred dinners in this house, and never recollect a failure."

The company now began to prepare for departure. The horses were ordered, and Lady Starkey told Sir John she would take him to town, if he could manage to ride with her and Rose. The old baronet thankfully accepted.

Once more, Mildred had to put on her riding-habit, which by this time had been thoroughly dried.

Before they set out on the ride back, Mildred said to Stanley, "I haven't thanked you half enough for helping me out of the river. Come and breakfast with us to-morrow morning at the Grosvenor, and give me an opportunity of doing so."

"With pleasure," replied Stanley.

Before this, Lady Starkey, with her niece and Sir John, had set off in the

brougham, and all the rest of the party now started, followed by the grooms, as in the morning.

Mildred was quite delighted to find herself once more on the back of her famous hunter, and only regretted that she was compelled to proceed at such slow pace.

"As it happens to be such a fine night, there seems no reason why we shouldn't get on," she cried. "What say you, papa?"

"I object to it," he replied. "I cannot allow you to scamper off. Keep near me."

So Mildred was obliged to control her impatience.

Darcy, however, contrived to get on her other side, and since Lady Talmash was constantly engaged in conversation with the squire, he had plenty of opportunity of talking to the young lady.

Though he had been disappointed more than once in the course of the day, he thought he should now be able to make up for all previous ill success. But Mildred was better watched than he supposed. Lady Talmash had very quick ears, and whenever she thought he was putting a question that had better not be answered,

she gave the squire a hint, and there was an end of it.

Stanley rode at the back with Colonel Ratcliffe.

As far as could be judged, he had not quite recovered from the declaration he had heard in the wood. Whether he should be reinstated as one of Mildred's suitors, he couldn't tell. He thought not.

On arriving in town the squire proceeded at once to the Grosvenor, where all the horses—except Stanley's, which was from a different stable—were delivered to the grooms.

While bidding good-night to Darcy, the squire told him he would call at Tattersall's next morning to settle matters. A singular smile played on Darcy's countenance, but he made no remark.

XXII.

MRS. BRERETON ARRIVES IN TOWN.

Owing, perhaps, to her unlooked for bath in the Thames, Mildred felt a good deal fatigued next morning. Still, she managed to make her appearance at nine o'clock, the hour appointed for breakfast, and very soon afterwards, the whole party, including Stanley, were assembled.

An excellent breakfast was placed before them—tea and coffee, with broiled fish and broiled ham—and the two gentlemen seemed disposed to do justice to it. But the squire had only just helped himself to a slice of broiled salmon when he called out:

"I hope I shall be able to settle my business to-day, so that we may go back to Beaucliffe to-morrow at the latest."

"I'm in no hurry whatever to leave town, papa," said Mildred. "I've enjoyed myself so much since I've been here that I should like to stay a few days longer."

"Oh, you can't do that," replied the squire. "I don't mind giving you to-day; but I won't promise you to-morrow. What says your ladyship? Are you anxious to remain here?"

"I think I should like to stop another day," said Lady Talmash, consulting Mildred by a look.

"Well, then, we'll leave to-morrow," said the squire. "And perhaps we may be able to find our way to Greenwich and get some more fish and whitebait. I hope you will dine with us, Stanley, and pray bring with you Lady Starkey and Miss Hylton!"

"I will deliver your invitation, sir, and I have no doubt they will accept it. But I think it not at all improbable my mother may be here to-day."

"What, is your mother coming up?"

"She is," replied Stanley.

"Then I really think we must stop another day," said the squire.

A great deal of pleasant chat took place at the breakfast. It might be a mistake,

but Stanley thought Mildred was anxious to make up her quarrel with him, and it was quite certain that Lady Talmash would be glad to effect a reconciliation between the former lovers. But Stanley had become very unlike his former self, and made no advance. That Rose Hylton had gained possession of his heart was not absolutely certain, but Mildred thought so. Be that as it might, she determined to win it back again.

Breakfast over, the squire announced his plans for the day. "In the first place," he said, "I intend to go and pay for the horse. You can then do what you like with it, but I would advise you to leave it at Tattersall's stables. As I am merely going to Hyde Park Corner on business, I shan't take you with me, but I advise you to go and call on Lady Starkey in Berkeley-square. If her ladyship and her niece will dine with us at Blackwall I shall be delighted. Don't wait for me. I shall go down by one of the steamers, and will order dinner as soon as I arrive. For you, Mildred, I have a special injunction. Should you meet Sir John Lambert at Lady Starkey's, pray ask him to dine with us. I

shall be terribly disappointed if you don't see him."

"Make yourself perfectly easy on that score," said Stanley. "I'll engage to find him, and deliver the invitation, and I'm quite certain he'll come."

Soon after this, the squire set off to Tattersall's, having his cheque-book in his pocket, with the intention of paying for the horse.

But we do not mean to follow him. Our way lies towards Berkeley-square, for it is to Lady Starkey's charming house that three of our friends are bound.

As soon as the door was thrown open, and Stanley perceived Minshull in the hall, he felt certain his mother had arrived, and so it proved, for on questioning the old man-servant, he learnt that Mrs. Brereton had arrived tolerably early on the previous evening, and had not been much fatigued by the journey.

"Where are the ladies?" demanded Stanley.

"They have just finished breakfast, sir," replied Minshull, "and are now in her ladyship's boudoir."

While these inquiries were answered, a

footman had been waiting to conduct them to the ladies, and he now fulfilled his duties.

As they entered the boudoir, Lady Starkey rose to welcome them, and Stanley perceived his mother seated on a sofa with Rose. She looked none the worse for the journey—in fact, the exertion had roused her up, and done her good.

"How long is it since you were last in town?" said Stanley.

"I can scarcely tell you," she replied. "But it's a great many years ago, and I never expected to be here again. But I couldn't resist Lady Starkey's kind invitation."

"And very glad I am to see you," said her ladyship.

"We're all in town just now, you see, Mrs. Brereton," said Mildred; "and enjoying ourselves immensely."

"To say nothing of an occasional tumble into the river," rejoined Mrs. Brereton. "I've already heard of your accident."

"Luckily, it wasn't attended by any unpleasant consequences. I didn't even catch cold. Papa wants you to dine with him at Greenwich to-day, Lady Starkey, and

bring your party with you, and I hope you will."

"With much pleasure," replied her ladyship, consulting the others.

"I have been to Richmond, when I was quite young," said Mrs. Brereton; "but not to Greenwich, so the trip will be something quite new to me. In fact, I have so much to see that I scarcely know where to begin, and as yet I haven't caught a glimpse of the Thames."

"Then you may expect to be greatly amused by what you will see from the steamboat," said Lady Talmash.

Just then, Sir John Lambert made his appearance. He was heartily welcomed by all, but being a stranger to Mrs. Brereton, he had to be presented to her by her son. He then had a little talk to her, and found her very chatty and agreeable.

"Now, Sir John," said Mildred, coming up to him, "I must give you an invitation which cannot be refused. In fact, it is a command. You *must* dine with us to-day at Greenwich—to meet the rest of the party."

"That I will with the greatest pleasure,

my dear," he replied. "But are we to have precisely the same party we had yesterday?"

"We have already got one new guest," replied Mildred. "But I shouldn't at all be surprised if papa were to ask Captain Darcy and Colonel Ratcliffe. He is sure to meet them at Tattersall's."

"And sure to invite them, I think, though he declared he wouldn't," said Stanley. "Besides, you can't object," he added, lowering his voice, "Captain Darcy is now an established admirer of yours."

"Nothing of the kind," she replied.

Shortly afterwards, to the great surprise of his daughter and Lady Talmash, the squire made his appearance.

"Has something happened, papa, that we see you here?" cried Mildred.

"I'll attend to you in a minute," replied the squire.

And after he had paid his respects to all the ladies, and shaken hands very heartily with Sir John Lambert, he took his daughter and Lady Talmash aside, and said to them:

"Now, I'll tell you why I came here in such a desperate hurry. What do you think? Captain Darcy wishes to present you

with his famous hunter. Tattersall refused to accept the cheque for three hundred pounds that I offered him, and said I owed him nothing. He then told me that Captain Darcy intended to present the horse to my daughter. While I was trying to recover from my surprise at this information, Darcy made his appearance with his faithful friend, Colonel Ratcliffe, and, in very complimentary terms, begged permission to offer you the horse. I thanked him very much, but declined. However, he said it would be a great disappointment to him, and begged me to consider the matter. Since he urged it so much, I said I would consult you."

"Well, you have consulted me, dear papa," said Mildred, "and I answer that I won't accept the horse as a gift. I'll buy it—or rather, you'll buy it—but I couldn't be beholden to Captain Darcy for such a present."

"Quite right," said Lady Talmash. "You can't accept the horse."

"I won't," said Mildred.

"I am very glad you have come to that determination," said the squire.

They were still talking over the matter

when Captain Darcy and Colonel Ratcliffe arrived, and shook hands with Lady Starkey. Darcy then went up to Mildred and said:

"I cannot make up my mind to sell you my horse. I trust you will allow me to present him to you?"

"Impossible!" she replied, in a decided tone.

The response was heard by all the room.

Darcy looked a good deal confused.

You are needlessly punctilious," he said. "I am sure I know a dozen girls who would accept the horse from me."

"That may be," said Lady Talmash; "but I think Miss Warburton quite right. She cannot consent to be under so great an obligation to you."

"If that is your ladyship's real opinion, I will say no more," replied Darcy; "however mortified I may be at the refusal."

"And I trust you will allow me to pay you the cheque for three hundred pounds, which I have drawn out?" said the squire.

"Yes, yes, you must take it," cried Colonel Ratcliffe.

"I yield, since everybody is against me," replied Darcy.

And with a reproachful look at Mildred, he put the cheque in his waistcoat pocket.

The squire made no difference in his manner towards Darcy after this incident, though he didn't like it.

In fact, as soon as the matter was settled, he asked him and Colonel Ratcliffe to dinner at Greenwich.

XXIII.

A DINNER AT GREENWICH.

LATER in the day, all the ladies, attended by Sir John Lambert and Stanley, set out by steamboat to Greenwich.

The squire had gone on by himself to order dinner, and Captain Darcy and Colonel Ratcliffe meant to follow by rail.

As the steamer in which the ladies had embarked was by no means full, they all remained on deck, and greatly enjoyed the excursion.

The crowded state of the river, the various objects to be seen on either side, the magnificent new embankment (the greatest of modern metropolitan improvements), the noble bridges, St. Paul's, the Tower, and other buildings, which, though

scarcely noticed by the ordinary Londoner, have a special attraction to country-folk—these gave them plenty to look at and talk about, till the magnificent hospital was reached.

So far from finding the trip tedious, they were quite sorry when it was ended.

On landing, the party walked for a short time upon the terrace, and examined the obelisk, after which Sir John Lambert led them to the Painted Hall.

We shall content ourselves by saying that they found more than enough to occupy them for an hour, and after this brief inspection they proceeded to the park, where they spent another hour to their entire satisfaction.

Old Minshull had been permitted to attend his mistress on this trip, and to him it was a wonderful treat. Often had he dreamed of Greenwich Hospital, but never expected to behold it. Now the vision was realised.

Owing to the absence of the other gentlemen, the care of the ladies necessarily devolved on Sir John Lambert and Stanley. Sir John, who was acquainted with everything worth seeing about town, proved him-

self an excellent cicerone, and Stanley did his best.

The weather was quite as fine as it had been on the previous day, so that the park was most enjoyable, and all the distant views could be seen.

On the question being put to her by Stanley, Rose declared she didn't know which she liked best—Richmond or Greenwich—both were enchanting. Mildred unhesitatingly decided in favour of Richmond.

They were still lingering in the park, seated on the side of a hill, commanding a lovely and most extensive prospect, when they were joined by the squire, who had got through all his business very satisfactorily—had secured a good room looking on the river, at the principal hotel, and had ordered the best fish dinner that could be produced. Evidently, the looks and manner of the country gentleman had propitiated the manager of the hotel, who treated him with profound respect, and told him that if he had been the Lord Mayor himself, his commands would not have been more carefully attended to. All matters that had bothered our worthy friend during the

morning had long since subsided, and he was now extremely cheerful.

Seating himself on the grass between Lady Starkey and Mrs. Brereton, he began to look around, and lifted up his hands with wonder and delight.

"I don't think I ever beheld a scene, even in Cheshire, that pleased me more than this!" he exclaimed.

"I am quite of the same opinion, Mr. Warburton," said Mrs. Brereton.

Then, noticing old Minshull standing at no great distance, gazing rapturously at the prospect, she asked his opinion.

"I can't express my feelings, ma'am," replied the old man. "But while reflecting that it is the great river Thames I behold, I am struck with amazement."

"A very good answer, Minshull," said the squire. "That consideration makes the view so striking. From no other hill in England—perhaps, none in the world—can such a prospect be contemplated. Nowhere else can such magnificent docks be seen as yonder—nor such splendid ships, and such a fine arsenal."

Nothing could be pleasanter than the

position taken up by the party, and they had not quitted it, when Captain Darcy and Colonel Ratcliffe entered the park, and speedily discovering their friends, made their way to them.

Placing himself, without ceremony, beside Mildred, Darcy at once commenced an animated conversation with her—hoping all was now right, and expressing his infinite regret at the unintentional annoyance he had caused her.

"I shall know how to conduct myself in future," he said. "I didn't think you were so particular; and I couldn't possibly imagine you would object to such a trifling present."

"Do you call that valuable horse a trifling present?" she remarked. "However, we've agreed to let the subject drop."

"But understand that my sole desire was to please you," said Darcy, with an expression of great humility, "and if I have been guilty of an error, it has been purely unintentional. I ought certainly to have consulted you before acting as I did. But I really and truly thought you would be pleased."

This was said with such an air of

penitent devotion that Mildred could not but forgive him.

Just then the squire looked at his watch, and informed his friends that it was time to proceed to dinner.

Thereupon all were quickly in motion, and led by the squire, who took charge of Lady Starkey, the whole party moved off towards the hotel.

Darcy had contrived to obtain Mildred's arm, and did not mean to surrender it. Sir John Lambert selected Lady Talmash, Colonel Ratcliffe took Mrs. Brereton, and Stanley was made happy by the possession of Rose.

Thus agreeably arranged, the party could not be otherwise than cheerful.

A large room with windows looking upon the river had been selected, and the table was remarkably well set out—an unwonted display of plate and glass being made.

The dinner commenced with turtle soup, and it proved so good that a second supply was required. Punch was offered to the gentlemen, and in no instance refused, but the pleasant beverage did not find favour with the ladies, who rejected it in favour of well-iced champagne.

All fish dinners seem alike, but there is an immense difference in the actual entertainment. On this occasion every dish was meritorious, and several were so good that two of our elderly friends ran some risk of repletion. The whitebait was perfection—both plain and devilled—and, in this case, the palm of merit was assigned to Greenwich. Of the rest of the dinner we can speak very highly, but its great triumphs consisted in the fish. Even at Amsterdam, turbot, salmon, soles, whitings, lobsters, lampreys, and oysters were never better dressed than on this occasion. The only wines served were champagne and hock—both being super-excellent.

At the close of the repast, the company returned to town by rail.

Lady Starkey and her friends were taken to Berkeley-square by Sir John Lambert and Stanley, while Darcy and Colonel Ratcliffe insisted on attending Lady Talmash and Mildred to the Grosvenor.

On taking leave of the squire, both these gentlemen were very particular in thanking him for what they termed "the best fish dinner they had ever eaten."

They did not enter the hotel—though

they were asked to do—as everything had been said that it was safe to say on the railway, but Darcy obtained permission to call on the ladies next day.

As the two officers walked across St. James's Park to their club, Darcy remarked, "I think I have now completely reinstated myself, both with father and daughter."

"Yes, I think you have," replied the colonel. "But proceed cautiously. You will never win her if you commit a second error. Try and make a friend of Lady Talmash."

"I despair of doing so," replied Darcy. "She favours Stanley Brereton."

XXIV.

HOW DARCY WAS RECEIVED NEXT MORNING.

True to his appointment, Darcy presented himself next morning at the Grosvenor.

The squire had gone out, but the ladies, who were attired for a walk, received him in a very friendly manner.

Mildred seemed to like his society, but not more than that of half a dozen other young men whom she had held in her fetters, and who were now happily released.

Mildred's fault was in giving her admirers too much encouragement at first, and then suddenly throwing them over in favour of a new pretendant. So fascinating was she, when she chose, and she almost always chose to be fascinating, that few could resist her.

Perhaps the only person who had really produced an impression on her volatile heart was Stanley Brereton, and, until very recently, he had no chance whatever of obtaining her hand. But by an unaccountable perversity, ever since his position had been so unexpectedly improved, she had become apparently indifferent to him. Apparently, we say, because such was not in reality the case, but the feigned coolness produced just the same effect as the true on Stanley's highly susceptible temperament.

Darcy had tact enough to discover this, and though he had met with no opposition from Stanley, he recognised in him a dangerous rival.

On the morning in question, as we have stated, Darcy was received with every mark of favour, and considered his case progressing most satisfactorily, but he was mistaken. He had not arrived more than five minutes, and was chatting most agreeably, when Mildred suddenly arose, and glancing rather significantly at Lady Talmash, quitted the room.

Fancying she would return immediately,

Darcy did not seem to notice her departure, but he was not long left in doubt.

Assuming a different manner, Lady Talmash said to him:

"I'm glad you came this morning. I have something to say to you about Miss Warburton."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Darcy, alarmed at this commencement, though he took care not to manifest his uneasiness.

Lady Talmash paused for a moment to give effect to her words, looking very calm and collected, and then observed:

"I think I am not wrong in assuming that you admire Miss Warburton?"

"Certainly not," said Darcy, "I admire her exceedingly. She has produced a stronger effect upon me than anyone of your sex ever did before. It is my intention to solicit her hand in due form from her father, and I trust he won't refuse it me."

"Have you obtained the young lady's consent to that step?" asked her ladyship.

"Not exactly," he replied. "But I do not imagine she will refuse permission."

"Had you not better clearly ascertain the point?" said Lady Talmash. "My own opinion is that the step would not be

entirely agreeable to her. In plain terms, however flattered she might be, she would not be disposed to accept the offer."

Quite astounded, Darcy began to think her ladyship must be employed to give him a refusal. He therefore resolved to change his tactics, and said:

"Pray understand me, dear Lady Talmash. I have conceived the strongest passion for your beautiful friend, Mildred Warburton. Her charms have positively bewitched me—and a refusal on her part would drive me to distraction. Have some pity upon me, and help me! You may do so without fear. I will do my best to make your charming friend happy; and I am quite sure I can do so. I will become the most devoted husband——"

"You promise great things," interrupted Lady Talmash, smiling. "All men do so. But women are excessively foolish who believe them."

"Does your ladyship doubt what I assert?" he cried, half angrily.

"No," she replied; "you mean it now, but you will change hereafter. Mildred has consulted me on this subject and I have given her my frank opinion. I do not

think even she, beautiful and attractive as she is, and she is the most beautiful creature I ever beheld—could keep you constant."

"You are entirely mistaken in me," cried Darcy. "My future happiness, I feel, is so entirely dependent upon her, that I will do aught to obtain her."

"Promise everything?"

"Yes, and fulfil all my promises!" he cried. "I see my word is doubted, but I think I could convince her of my sincerity. I hope I am not to be dismissed without a hearing."

"Nothing would be gained by an interview," said Lady Talmash.

"I think otherwise," he replied, "I am sure the opinion she has formed of me—owing to some misrepresentation—would be altered."

"I cannot recommend an interview. I do not think it would lead to any good," said her ladyship.

At this moment the door opened, and Mildred entered the room.

Darcy seemed disposed to rush forward, and throw himself at her feet, but her looks checked him.

She seemed perfectly calm and unmoved.

"Lady Talmash, I suppose, has acquainted you with my sentiments?" she said.

"I can scarcely believe they are your sentiments," he replied. "Do you absolutely reject my suit?"

"I have discovered that I do not like you sufficiently to marry you," she replied, unhesitatingly.

"Then why give me so much encouragement?" he cried. "It was scarcely fair. I had a right to presume upon it; and no wonder I did so."

"I tell you frankly I have changed my mind," she replied, without any alteration of manner. "I do not think I should be happy with you."

"Give me your reason for this opinion," he cried. "Is it your own, or another's?" he added significantly.

"You have no right to ask that question," interposed Lady Talmash. "It is sufficient that Miss Warburton has adopted the opinion."

"Pardon me, I don't think so," responded Darcy. "I should like to know whether or not she has been influenced in her feelings towards me."

"I will answer the question positively myself," said Mildred. "I certainly did entertain a liking for you, but nothing more—nothing more—mind you. Your present of the horse alarmed me. I knew what would follow. I then consulted my heart, and found I could not accept you."

"And this is the fact?" asked Darcy, in a tone of bitter disappointment.

"It is," she replied.

"I certainly think you have been trifling with me," he rejoined. "But never mind! I must bear the rejection as well as I can. If am rightly informed I am not the first who has suffered. But what is to follow? Are we to remain friends?"

"Friends, of course," replied Mildred, smiling. "But upon this clear understanding."

"No more love-making," said Lady Talmash.

"Very well; I accept," said Darcy.

As the words were uttered, the squire entered the room.

Most probably, he knew what was about to occur, and had got out of the way. Be that as it might, he went up to Darcy as if

nothing had happened, and shook hands with him in his usual friendly manner.

"We are going to try our new horse in the Park this afternoon," he said.

"Ah! I shall never meet with such another," said Darcy. "I declare positively I would only have sold the horse to Miss Warburton."

"You appear to repent what you have done," said Mildred, in a tone of pity. "You shall have him back again, if you will."

"No, no!" cried Darcy, "I can't do that."

And bowing to them, he rather hastily quitted the room.

"Well, that little affair is settled, eh?" said the squire, with a very droll expression of countenance.

"Quite," replied Lady Talmash. "And very satisfactorily settled, in my opinion."

XXV.

LADY STARKEY EXPLAINS HER INTENTIONS IN REGARD TO ROSE.

THE ladies at the house in Berkeley-square have just finished breakfast.

Rose has quitted the room, but Lady Starkey has detained Mrs. Brereton, because she wishes to have a little private talk with her.

"Now, dear Mrs. Brereton," said her ladyship, "do, pray, tell me what you think of my niece? I shall be very much surprised—very much disappointed—if you don't like her."

"She is a very lovable girl," replied Mrs. Brereton, emphatically. "As far as I can perceive she hasn't a fault. Moreover, she is uncommonly pretty."

"She really deserves the commendation you bestow upon her," said Lady Starkey, greatly pleased. "She is most amiable, and I love her as much as if she were my own daughter. My motive for asking your opinion of the dear girl is this. I fancy a feeling of regard, very likely to become a lasting attachment, has already sprung up between her and Stanley; and I really think she would make him an excellent wife — far better than that fascinating coquette, Mildred Warburton."

"Such is my own opinion," replied Mrs. Brereton. "But you needn't give yourself any concern on that score. No union is ever likely to occur between Stanley and Mildred. She is willing to flirt with him, but nothing more. Even when there did not seem the slightest chance of obtaining her hand, she gave him encouragement. Mildred has always some new admirer. Yesterday I observed Captain Darcy was the favourite, but it wouldn't surprise me if she dismissed him to-day."

"I hope not," exclaimed Lady Starkey. "In that case Stanley might be lured back again."

"I don't think so," replied Mrs. Brere-

ton. "He appears to have been slighted, and his proud spirit will never brook that. No, I fancy he will now devote himself exclusively to Rose, and with a little assistance on your ladyship's part, a match may very easily be brought about between them."

"Such is my earnest desire," said Lady Starkey. "It is my firm belief they would be extremely happy together, and Sir John Lambert is of the same opinion, or I wouldn't for the world encourage the scheme."

She paused for a moment and then added: "You quite understand, I believe, dear Mrs. Brereton, that I regard my darling Rose as a daughter."

"I cannot doubt your ladyship's intentions towards her," replied Mrs. Brereton. "And I really think she deserves your kindness."

"Rose will have all my property," said Lady Starkey. "I wished to give you that assurance."

"She deserves her good fortune," said Mrs. Brereton, scarcely able to conceal her satisfaction. "Your ladyship may calcu-

late on my best aid. I should be truly rejoiced to see my son so well wedded."

"Should the marriage take place, I hope and trust it may turn out well," said Lady Starkey, with a sigh, caused by some painful recollections. "Never did woman love her husband more fondly than I loved Sir Thomas—and yet——"

"Pray don't think of it, dearest Lady Starkey," interrupted Mrs. Brereton. "Stanley is very differently constituted from his unfortunate uncle. His nature is extremely affectionate, and I am certain he will make a devoted husband. If I doubted it, I should not desire to see him married—especially to such a charming girl as Rose—for it would kill me, if he made her unhappy. But there is no fear of that."

"I trust not," sighed Lady Starkey. "But let us go up-stairs."

Thereupon, they proceeded to the boudoir, where they found Rose, who was engaged on some little feminine employment. She welcomed them with smiles.

"Well, my love," said Lady Starkey, "I think we must be quiet to-day."

Rose did not seem at all surprised by the

intimation, but simply remarked, "I suppose we shall drive out as usual?"

"Oh, yes! we shall drive in the Park in the afternoon—of course," said Lady Starkey. "Mrs. Brereton will be amused by seeing the company and equipages. I wonder Stanley has not made his appearance. He said he should be here early."

And as she spoke, the young man himself entered the room.

"Oh! here you are!" he exclaimed. "I expected to find you at breakfast. I hope you are not all tired to death?"

"We are not in the least tired," replied Rose. "How could you suppose it possible, when we passed our time so agreeably?"

"Well, can you stand such another day, do you think?" inquired Stanley, laughing.

"Oh! dear no," cried both her ladyship and Mrs. Brereton. "We must have some rest. Would you kill us?"

"Not quite," replied Stanley. "But I thought you might like an excursion to Hampton Court or Windsor."

"A week hence we might think of it; but not now," replied Lady Starkey.

Rose made no remark, but she didn't seem to agree with her aunt.

"In less than a week the Warburtons and Lady Talmash will have left town," said Stanley.

"We can't sacrifice ourselves to please them, much as we like them," said Lady Starkey. "Besides, I don't wish Rose to go out every day on a pleasure party,"

"Very proper," echoed Mrs. Brereton.

"But this was to be a very small friendly party," urged Stanley.

"Quite as large as the party yesterday, I dare say," rejoined Lady Starkey.

"No, there are one or two omissions that would certainly be made," said Stanley.

"If those omissions are made, Miss Warburton won't escape," said Rose.

"Oh! yes, she will," replied Stanley. "Yesterday Captain Darcy was a great favourite, but he has very likely got his *congé* to-day."

"Is it possible she can be so inconstant?" cried Rose.

"Such is her character," replied Stanley.

The young lady glanced at her aunt, but read no contradiction in her looks.

"She enjoys, and not undeservedly, the reputation of being a great coquette," said Mrs. Brereton.

"I am very sorry to hear it," observed Rose. "Sir John Lambert told me she is dreadfully fickle, but I thought he must exaggerate."

"He did not exaggerate in the slightest degree," said Mrs. Brereton. "She is always changing her admirers."

"Dear me, how shocking!" exclaimed Rose.

While they were thus talking, Sir John Lambert came in, and almost immediately burst into a laugh.

"May we hear what amuses you, Sir John?" asked Lady Starkey.

"Undoubtedly," he replied, still laughing. "I have just met Darcy, and what do you think? You saw what a great favourite he appeared to be yesterday with Mildred Warburton. Well, he persuaded himself, as several others have done, that he had only to propose to be accepted. Accordingly, this morning he called at the Grosvenor Hotel with that intention. Suspecting his design the young lady immediately quitted the room, and left him to Lady Talmash, by

whom his hopes were quietly and effectively extinguished. Miss Warburton, he was informed, had never given him a serious thought—never meant to accept him. He remonstrated, and was allowed a hearing; but he gained nothing by the motion. His dismissal was confirmed. This relation must be correct, since I had it from the luckless victim himself, whom I met just now in Pall Mall as I came here."

Apparently, Sir John had very little commiseration for his friend, for on the close of his recital, he again laughed loudly, and was joined in his merriment by Stanley.

Both Lady Starkey and Mrs. Brereton seemed amused by Darcy's failure, but Rose was shocked by the treatment he had experienced.

"After the marked encouragement given to Captain Darcy yesterday," she said, "I think Miss Warburton's conduct most unfeeling."

"It serves him quite right," cried Stanley, laughing. "I can't pity him in the least. I expected he would make a fool of himself, but I didn't think he would be in such a hurry to do it."

"He has made a fool of himself in more

ways than one in this affair," said Sir John. "He ought to have taken the hint given him."

"Anybody else would have done," said Stanley.

"Men won't always take a hint, however plain it may be," said Lady Starkey.

"Darcy is the last man I should have thought would act so foolishly," remarked Sir John. "But if I understand him aright he won't give up the chase."

"I shouldn't be surprised at anything he does," observed Lady Starkey.

As the words were uttered, the unlucky hero of the story just recounted, came in.

He saw at once that all was known, and was vexed at his imprudence in confiding the matter to Sir John.

But his coolness did not desert him. Marching up to Lady Starkey, he said in a voice that all might hear:

"I bring some droll news. Would you believe it? A young lady who smiled upon me very graciously yesterday, has just rejected me! Yes, absolutely rejected me! However, I don't despair. There may yet be a turn in my favour. If not, I shan't break my heart."

Though Stanley enjoyed Darcy's mortification, he could not help admiring his singular audacity. The two young men saluted each other coldly, and the looks they exchanged were by no means friendly.

For a few moments Lady Starkey did not recover from her surprise at Darcy's unexpected appearance, and when she addressed him she thought it best not to make any further allusion to his rejection by Mildred, but to let the matter drop.

Altogether the impression produced by the unsuccessful suitor was unfavourable, and everybody thought the young lady had acted judiciously in getting rid of him.

So unsatisfactory indeed was his reception, that he did not stay more than five minutes, and when he was gone they all gave vent to the laughter which they had hitherto restrained.

Let no unsuccessful suitor expect sympathy from his friends.

XXVI.

THE RIDE IN ROTTEN ROW.

Not long after Darcy's departure, the squire, with his bewitching daughter and Lady Talmash, made their appearance.

Lady Starkey did not give them the slightest hint that the rejected suitor had just left, or that she knew anything about what had recently occurred, and all the rest of the party were equally cautious; but when they regarded the lovely girl, with triumph written in her countenance, they did not wonder at Darcy's deep disappointment and mortification.

The fascinating coquette, as some of them termed her, was in high spirits, and seemed anxious to have a little talk with Stanley, but he kept out of her influence as long as he could.

When the squire was able to manage it, he took Sir John Lambert aside, hinting that he had something to tell him; and though they conversed in a low tone, the subject of the discourse was easily surmised.

Presently Lady Starkey interrupted them by inquiring from Mr. Warburton whether he intended to prolong his stay in town.

"I can scarcely tell," he replied, shrugging his shoulders. "I meant to leave to-day, but here I am. And were I to fix my departure for to-morrow something would be sure to detain me. I wish I had made an arrangement to stop a month."

"There is no reason, papa, why you should be in a hurry to go back," said Mildred. "I'm sure our time has passed most agreeably."

"I should think so," observed Lady Starkey, smiling.

"But I like the country better than town," said the squire.

"You won't complain of want of amusement, sir," remarked Lady Talmash. "Our time has been fully occupied. And to-day we have the Park where Mildred is sure to make a sensation with her new steed."

"No doubt of it," said Stanley.

"I have a great favour to ask of you, Stanley," said Mildred, coming up to him. "Pray accompany me during my ride. I'm sure you will."

She looked at him so entreatingly that he could not refuse.

"What I feared has occurred," whispered Lady Starkey to Sir John Lambert.

"Don't be alarmed," he replied in the same low tone. "He won't be entangled again."

"I'm not sure of that," said her ladyship.

Rose, who heard what passed, was not without uneasiness.

"Now you must all come and dine with me to-day at the Norwood Hotel," said the squire. "Those who like it, can spend a couple of hours or so previously at the Crystal Palace. What says your lordship? Does the plan suit you? You dine very well I am told at the Norwood Hotel. Sir John, I'm quite sure, will take charge of you and your ladies, and bring you by rail to the Crystal Palace."

Lady Starkey would have declined, but Sir John whispered her to accept.

Feeling sure he had some motive for the

suggestion, she complied, though rather reluctantly.

All was speedily arranged. Sir John promised to escort Lady Starkey and her friends by rail to the Crystal Palace, and order dinner, at the hour appointed, at the adjacent hotel.

The squire and his ladies did not stay much longer, and Stanley went with them.

"Now do tell me, dear Sir John," said Lady Starkey, aside to him, "why you advised me to accept Mr. Warburton's invitation to dinner. I really want to be quiet to-day, and so does Mrs. Brereton."

"Don't you see?" he replied in a whisper. "I want you to look after Stanley."

Her ladyship quite understood him.

Having arranged that they should start from the Victoria Station at three o'clock, Sir John likewise went his way.

When our peerless equestrienne, on her superb horse, rode into Rotten Row with Stanley beside her, attended by her father and Lady Talmash, and followed by a couple of grooms, she produced quite a sensation.

Everybody wondered who she was, but

no immediate information could be obtained. Numbers of young men drew up to see the new beauty pass by, and their expressions of admiration were loud enough to reach her ears.

Stanley heard all these praises, and though he fancied he had become indifferent to the lovely girl's charms, he soon found out his mistake.

By a variety of little arts, Mildred did her best to revive his passion, and it soon became evident that she had succeeded.

Before he had been an hour by her side he was as much in love with her as ever. Her wondrous fascination of manner, now exerted to the utmost, proved irresistible.

Lady Talmash was not blind to her lovely friend's success, and was greatly delighted by it. As a well-wisher to Stanley, she had been much put out by the manner in which he was thrown over for Darcy. Now that he had regained his ground, she hoped he would be able to hold it, and resolved to give him all the aid she could.

Never doubting her powers of fascination, Mildred was not surprised by her success.

But she scarcely expected it would be so speedy, and so complete.

No doubt the squire heard the praises lavished upon his lovely daughter, but he seemed quite unconscious of them.

One person, however, witnessed the fair girl's triumph with very bitter feelings.

This was Darcy.

Never before had he endured the pangs of jealousy so severely. Never had he felt so enraged by a rival's success. He vowed revenge.

But he could not at the moment exactly see how revenge was to be obtained.

He must wait, and take advantage of the first opportunity that offered. But his resolution was fixed.

The little party had quitted the Park, and were on their way to Norwood. They had ridden quickly as far as Dulwich, but proceeded at a more leisurely pace after quitting that pretty village.

The enchantress and her captive were somewhat in advance, so that it was quite possible for them to hold a little private conversation without being overheard by the others.

"Now do tell me, dear boy," said the fair creature, with a most bewitching look; "what has been the matter with you? Ever since I came to town you have been quite changed."

"I might ask the same of you, dearest girl," he rejoined; "and with much better reason. I really thought you had ceased to care for me, and had transferred your affections to another."

"Nonsense, dear boy!" she said, laughing. "How could you be so foolish? I own I have flirted a little with that vain and impertinent fellow, Darcy—just to amuse myself—nothing more. But when I found out, as I did yesterday, that he took the matter *au serieux*, I gave him an immediate and positive dismissal. Be sure he won't trouble my poor dear jealous pet again."

"But some one else may," rejoined Stanley; "if you flirt with him in the same manner. Dearest Mildred," he added, with an ardent look, "I love you to distraction, and a smile of encouragement from you, bestowed on any other, makes me frightfully jealous. Tell me! Can you devote yourself to me?"

She looked at him tenderly before she replied.

"Yes, I think I can. I like you better than any one else."

"Oh! If I felt quite sure of that!" he cried, passionately.

"Well, you may feel quite sure," she replied, with more earnestness than she had hitherto used. "Still, you must control your feelings of jealousy, or you may cause another rupture."

"I don't know how I can manage that," he cried. "Cannot matters be settled between us? May I talk to Lady Talmash? May I speak to the squire?"

"I have no objection whatever to your talking to Lady Talmash, who likes you very much, and will give you advice; but don't make a formal offer to papa just yet."

"Why delay, if you love me, as you admit?"

"You will be angry if I tell you the real reason," she said, hesitating.

"No, I won't," he cried.

"Unless you can conquer your feelings of jealousy, I daren't accept you," she replied, seriously. "I should always be afraid of a quarrel."

"I have conquered those feelings—completely conquered them," he cried.

"Since when?" she asked, incredulously.

"Since our present explanation," he replied. "You shall have no cause to complain of me in the future."

"Convince me of this, and I am yours as soon as you please."

"How am I to convince you," he rejoined.

"Consult Lady Talmash," she rejoined, laughing.

At the same time she signed with her whip to the others, and they cantered on till the Crystal Palace rose before them in all its splendour.

XXVII.

A LOVER LOST AND A LOST LOVER REGAINED.

On arriving at the Norwood Hotel, they found dinner had been ordered for seven o'clock in a private room by Sir John Lambert.

As it was then scarcely half-past six, there was time to join their friends for a few minutes in the Crystal Palace, but Mildred and Lady Talmash declined to go there, as they were in riding costume.

However, the squire and Stanley set off at once, and soon discovered the party near the central transept.

They were in high spirits, and did not complain of fatigue, though they had seen all that was to be seen—had visited the Pompeian Court, the Egyptian Court, the

Greek Court, the Alhambra Court, with the Court of Lions, and many other courts, too numerous to mention—and had just returned from the delightful gardens, where the fountains had displayed their wonders.

Mrs. Brereton and Rose were in ecstasies. The beauties of the Crystal Palace, which were new to them both, far exceeded their expectations.

As on the visit to Greenwich, Mrs. Brereton was attended by old Minshull, who was wonder-struck by all he beheld.

The smiles with which Rose welcomed Stanley caused that inconstant young gentleman much compunction. He reproached himself for his fickleness, and longed to tell her what had happened. But of course he couldn't do so just then. However, he felt he was acting a very unworthy part, and didn't in the least deserve the kind things Rose said to him.

We shall not attempt to defend his conduct, but are bound to state the truth. Poor Rose did not perceive any change, but then she had a great deal to tell, and had almost all the talk to herself.

But both Sir John Lambert and Lady Starkey, who watched him narrowly, formed

a much more accurate opinion of the state of things. Stanley felt their eyes were upon him, as well as those of his mother, and was careful, therefore, as to what he said and did.

"How did your daughter enjoy her ride in Rotten Row?" inquired Lady Starkey—not without a certain intention—of the squire.

"Very much, I fancy," he replied, guessing her motive. "But your ladyship must ask Stanley. He was with her all the time. I was behind with Lady Talmash."

"She could not fail to enjoy it," interposed Stanley, "for she was wonderfnlly admired. I never saw anything like it."

"You'll turn her head if you're not careful, sir," observed Mrs. Brereton to the squire.

"It is not so easily turned as you imagine, ma'am," he rejoined. "I dare say she paid as little attention as I did myself to those young puppies in Rotten Row."

"So much the better," said Mrs. Brereton. "But I have no doubt their impertinent remarks reached her ears."

"I can't tell," replied the squire, gruffly.

"Their remarks were complimentary—

highly complimentary—not impertinent," said Stanley. "They all agreed she is the prettiest girl and the best horsewoman they had seen for an age."

"If they told her that, I should call it impertinent," said Rose.

"But you must make some allowances for excitement," rejoined Stanley. "It was mere homage paid to her beauty and perfect horsemanship."

"It's time to go to dinner," interposed Sir John, looking at his watch, and offering an arm to Mrs. Brereton.

The squire took charge of her ladyship, and naturally Rose fell to the care of Stanley.

"Did Mildred really look as lovely as you have described her?" she asked, as they walked on.

"You will see her presently, and can judge for yourself," he rejoined.

Before he set off, the squire slipped half a crown into old Minshull's hand, and told him he might stop an hour longer in the palace, but must then come on to the hotel. The old man looked highly pleased.

The meeting of the ladies at the Norwood Hotel was very friendly and cheerful, and

Lady Starkey congratulated Mildred on the extraordinary effect she had produced in Rotten Row.

The party had a very nice room, and the dinner, which was served at once, was excellent.

Stanley sat between Mildred and Rose; but he certainly paid far more attention to the former than the latter.

His manner was so devoted that poor Rose became dreadfully jealous, and Lady Starkey felt that her worst fears were justified.

Sir John, likewise, began to think that the game was up. He didn't see what could be done, for the squire appeared perfectly indifferent, and was constantly jesting, and laughing heartily at his own jokes. As to wine, there was no stint of well-iced champagne, but very little else was drunk.

Not more than an hour was allowed for dinner, and then the horses were brought round, and Sir John took the ladies under his charge to the station.

Nothing was fixed for the morrow, as Lady Starkey declared she could not answer for herself, or for Mrs. Brereton.

Poor Rose squeezed Stanley's hand as they parted, and gave him a slightly reproachful look.

While the neglected girl was whirling by rail towards the Victoria Station, the lover she had lost, and the rival who had won him back, were enjoying a most delightful ride to town.

The evening was charming, and seemed expressly made for them—soft and warm, with just light enough to enable them to distinguish each other's faces.

Close together they rode—O! very close; while Lady Talmash and the squire were in front.

The fair coquette had laid aside her coquetry, and treated her lover more frankly than she had hitherto done—so frankly, indeed, that all his doubts vanished, and he entirely believed he had gained her heart.

They talked of the future, and Stanley asked her real opinion of Brereton Hall, and whether she thought she could make up her mind to live there, when it was restored.

"I could live there now—if you wished it," she replied.

The lover was surprised, and enchanted. He did not expect such a declaration.

"No, no, I won't put your affection to such a test," he said. "Still, as a complete restoration of the old place will take up some time, we may fit up a few rooms immediately—if you approve of the plan, and take a house in town, or elsewhere."

"Delightful," she exclaimed. "Just the thing I should like!"

Assisted by talk like this, need we say that their ride was pleasant, or that they were sorry when it was over?

The squire and Lady Talmash did not interfere with their discourse, or even look round; and as to the grooms, they did not trouble themselves about the lovers.

As they were approaching the Grosvenor, the enamoured youth told the object of his regard that it was the most delightful ride he had ever had in his life.

"May I call in the morning?" he asked.

"Certainly," she replied. "I shall expect you about eleven. Don't call on Lady Starkey until you have seen me."

"Have no fear of that," he replied.

As he assisted her to dismount, and she

sprang lightly into his arms, he longed most ardently to press her to his heart.

He led her to the door of the hotel, and then took leave of Lady Talmash and the squire, promising to see them on the morrow.

"Has he made an offer?" asked Lady Talmash, as she and Mildred went up-stairs.

"He has," replied the other; "but he is coming to-morrow morning to repeat it."

"And receive your answer," said her ladyship. "Well, we must be prepared for him. I don't think there will be any difficulty with papa."

"I think not," replied Mildred, laughing.

END OF VOL. I.

LONDON:
WHITING AND COMPANY, LIMITED, SARDINIA STREET, LINCOLN'S-INN-FIELDS.